

Voices of New Music on National Public Radio: *Radio Net*, *RadioVisions*, and *Maritime Rites*

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation focuses on the relationship between new American music and National Public Radio (NPR) during the 1970s and 1980s. NPR directly supported American experimental music, most often billed as “new music,” through programming that both consolidated a tradition and extended it by commissioning new works. I address three exemplary broadcasts, proposing that public radio utilized existing historical narratives of musical experimentalism while simultaneously revising and strengthening those narratives. I demonstrate ways in which the shows themselves, as well as their planning phases and promotional materials, served to gather individuals and musical practices together, defining and constructing musical experimentalism in the process.

Chapter 1 covers the importance of sonic experimentation in NPR’s original Statement of Purposes, claiming that author William Siemering’s attention to sound created a climate that was especially hospitable to musical and radiophonic experimentation. In Max Neuhaus’s *Radio Net* (1977), NPR’s very infrastructure became a musical instrument, showing the radical potential of NPR in its early days. Chapter 2 chronicles the production history of *RadioVisions* (1981) to establish the ways in which NPR’s imaginary listeners were essential during its planning phase: in the conception of the show, in the grant proposal to the NEA, and in the show’s content. I conclude that experimentalism’s potential for imagining an NPR audience allowed “new music” to become “American experimental music” as the *RadioVisions* project moved through the infrastructure of NPR. Chapter 3 explores the cultural valences and

authorities of the musical voices in *RadioVisions*'s segments "Details at Eleven," "Shoptalk," and "The Oldest Instrument," as well as Schuller's hosting voice in the context of public radio broadcasting.

Chapter 4 presents a history of the composition, production, and radio broadcast of *Maritime Rites* (1984). I argue that the differences between *Maritime Rites* and *RadioVisions* were, in part, representative of changes in NPR from 1981–85, particularly the role of the newly established Satellite Program Development Fund in supporting adventuresome programming. *Maritime Rites* served not only as a sonic documentation of the Eastern seaboard, but also as a sonic documentation of the landscape of improvisational experimental music in the mid-1980s, enhancing its fit on NPR as new music/radio documentary. Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the second segment of *Maritime Rites*, which featured Pauline Oliveros and her improvisation "Rattlesnake Mountain," as well as the voice of Karen MacLean (the only female lighthouse keeper in the series). This dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of NPR's history by addressing lesser-known yet significant cultural programs, as well as to a broader musicological understanding of how public radio contributed to the construction of musical experimentalism.

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*For Dan*

## INTRODUCTION

What are the “places” of my music? A partial answer would include: Cities, Streets, piazzas, houses, facades, fountains, historic buildings, stairwells, elevators, cellars, roofs, tunnels, parks, ports, rivers, lakes, bridges, coastlines, quarries, caves, trenches, open fields, valleys, moving vehicles, chaos, stillness, ecstasy, history and transcendence and, of course, concert halls.

—Alvin Curran<sup>1</sup>

In the latter half of the twentieth century, many composers imagined their music for presentation beyond the walls of traditional musical institutions. Some composers subverted musical rituals within concert halls (as John Cage had in 4'33"), but others rejected the space's ghosts entirely.<sup>2</sup> What was once a coveted site, where admission held the power to confer musical success, the concert hall became a bastion of “old” music.<sup>3</sup> The “newness” of a musical endeavor was often tied to its unconventional performance location as well as to its formal design. Alvin Curran explained that his (partial) flight from the concert hall was spurred by his commitment to musical experimentalism; he described an exciting foray into new “places and spaces.”

For decades, many composers and sound-artists have viewed the music institutions and especially the concert hall as a place of funereal ritual. So it is no wonder that a number

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<sup>1</sup> Alvin Curran, “Out of Place,” <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/out%20of%20place.html> (accessed November 17, 2009). Originally published as “Out of Place,” *Positionen* 42 (February 2000): 34–39. The author’s idiosyncratic spelling (“ecstasy” instead of ecstasy), punctuation, and capitalization are preserved.

<sup>2</sup> Lydia Goehr, on the other hand, argues that experimental music could not actually be redefined within the concert hall due to the structuring concept of *Werktreue*. See her critique of Cage’s 4'33" in chapter 9 of *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: an Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially pp. 264–65.

<sup>3</sup> See Catherine Cameron, *Dialectics in the Arts: The Rise of Experimentalism in American Music* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 83; Renée Levine Packer, who wrote of composers in Buffalo in the 1960s, notes: “The boundaries of what constituted a composer’s ‘territory’ were crumbling, and the conventional concert hall was not always the preferred venue for performance.” Levine Packer, *This Life of Sounds: Evenings for New Music in Buffalo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60–61. See also Kyle Gann, “The Importance of Being Downtown,” in *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3–11.

of adventurous artists began to seek out and occupy other places, other spaces to carry on their necessary work—questioning each and every aspect of the canon being, after all, the nature of the experimental arts of this century.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, as composers have been all-too-aware, these “other places” and “other spaces” were often nestled within new institutions fraught with their own rituals. Adventuresome composers might escape some of the haunting restrictions of the concert hall, but they would also likely encounter new determining structures on their journeys. In spite of Curran’s suggestion that stepping out of the concert hall was a mobile form of canon-critique, the concert hall had never been the sole determiner of canonical status. New musical canons and their associated definitions and historical narratives were also constructed outside its walls; none more so than those characterizing American experimentalism during the twentieth century.

This dissertation treats public radio as one of these “other spaces and places” for new music in the U.S., positing that National Public Radio (NPR) played a limited yet significant role in grouping American experimental music during the 1970s and 1980s. NPR did not merely offer one new “space” for the performance of experimental music; rather, I argue that its institutional discourses and practices helped shape the category of “musical experimentalism” through discrete programs on new music. NPR directly supported American experimental music through programming that both consolidated a tradition and extended it by commissioning new works. My dissertation addresses three exemplary broadcasts that illuminate the multiple ways in which NPR played this role: *Radio Net* (1977), *RadioVisions* (1981), and *Maritime Rites* (1984).

The following chapters focus on the overlap between creative sound, experimental radio, and new music in these three shows, especially as demonstrated through the artistic manipulation of the spoken word. Numerous composers and sound artists, including John Adams, John Cage,

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<sup>4</sup> Curran, “Out of Place,” <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/out%20of%20place.html>.

Alvin Curran, Steve Reich, Brenda Hutchinson, Trevor Wishart, and Pamela Z (to name only a very few), have produced pieces sharing dual status as radiophonic art and music. Their radiophonic pieces are indebted to several larger musical and artistic trends prevalent during the twentieth century: the extension of Edgard Varèse's broad definition of music as "organized sound;"<sup>5</sup> a logical outgrowth of a Cagian emphasis on ambient sound; the growing popularity of text sound composition; and an increased use of technology and popular media to rethink composition.<sup>6</sup> Fittingly, a growing body of scholarly literature on music, radio, and sound art has begun to address the connections between radio and new music, especially in the U.S., Europe, and Canada. The majority of these authors, including Douglas Kahn, Gregory Whitehead, Frances Dyson, Dan Lander, and Brandon LaBelle, have been concerned with the aesthetic and theoretical connections between broadcast media and new music/sound art.<sup>7</sup> Many authors have approached radiophonic pieces as electroacoustic music, emphasizing the technological and electronic elements of the works and treating radio as a means of distribution.<sup>8</sup> However, these many informative studies neglect the influence that specific broadcasting institutions may have

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<sup>5</sup> Edgard Varèse and Chou Wen-chung, "The Liberation of Sound," *Perspectives of New Music* 5/1 (Autumn–Winter 1966): 18.

<sup>6</sup> See Timothy D. Taylor, *Strange Sounds* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 41–71. For compositional perspective on musical innovation through technological development, see Lejaren Hiller and L. M. Isaacson, *Experimental Music: Composition with an Electronic Computer* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> See Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds., *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994); Francis Dyson, *Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Dan Lander and Micah Lexier, *Sound by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990); Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander, eds., *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound, and Transmission* (Banff, Alta., Canada: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1994); and Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum International, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Leigh Landy, *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 11, where he argues, "Radio art's history demonstrates an evolution from radio play through *musique concrète* and documentary radio to any manifestation of sonic art through the radio medium." See also chapter 3 of Joel Chadabe, *Electric Sound: The Past and Promise of Electronic Music* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 63–80.

had on the resulting programs or on the categorization and historical presentation of this music.<sup>9</sup> My dissertation complements this research with critical case studies that reveal the multiple and often contradictory ways in which discourses of musical experimentalism, specifically, were enacted and performed through the creation of radio programming within the particular institutional setting of NPR.

Public radio in the U.S. consists of many autonomous local stations as well as national and independent programming/membership institutions, and many of these stations have provided an admirable amount of airtime for new music.<sup>10</sup> Pacifica stations (notably WBAI in New York City and KPFA in Berkeley) have especially welcomed new music and experimental radiophonic art, as have college and community stations. From within this larger context of new music and public radio broadcasting, my dissertation concentrates on NPR's activities as a national programming and distribution entity. NPR has benefited greatly from the rich landscape of local public broadcasting stations, knitting some of these stations together into a large network through a national membership system, and later strengthening those stitches considerably through its control of the public radio satellite WESTAR. It has also shaped the sonic character of its member stations by providing standardized programming—programming intended to be aurally identifiable as an NPR product. NPR's member stations have continued to specialize individually by broadcasting daily fares of news, distinct local programming, classical music,

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<sup>9</sup> One notable exception is Robert Fink's intriguing chapter on minimalism as the "new Baroque music," where he asserts that LP listening practices and classical music radio helped popularize Baroque music as easy listening in the 1950s and 1960s. See Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music and Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 169–207. Aaron Johnson's forthcoming dissertation will also be an important contribution on the relationship between genre and broadcasting practices, as he treats jazz radio's effect on historical constructions of "jazz" and related musical categories. Johnson, *Jazz and Radio in the United States: Mediation, Genre, and Patronage* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, in progress).

<sup>10</sup> The new music programming of several stations in particular, including WBAI and KPFA, would merit book length studies.

and jazz.<sup>11</sup> Member stations thus carried a mixture of nationally and locally produced programming that has become a powerful tool in creating listener loyalty. NPR's efforts to create a unified, national public radio system that was defined by its programming, as well as its practical and unique (for public radio) ability to reach a national audience, make the institution exceptional within the often fragmented and locally driven world of public broadcasting. Furthermore, it is notable that this mainstream institution began with a progressive and unusual commitment to promoting experimental radio/sound and contemporary art—a commitment that occasionally manifested itself through exceptional programming on new music.

### **Creative Sound, NPR's Sound, and New Music Programming**

NPR was incorporated in early 1970, its existence made possible as a result of provisions for public radio included in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.<sup>12</sup> It grew quickly during its first two decades, primarily driven by the success of its still popular news magazines. Interestingly, it was—in part—NPR's creative treatment of documentary sound that came to characterize its flagship program *All Things Considered* (ATC). The news magazine was marked by its “inventive and playful use of sound,” and especially its evocative use of ambient sound.<sup>13</sup> A

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<sup>11</sup> Because of how common classical and jazz formats are among its member stations, NPR has often been associated with music primarily through these categories. The *New Grove* article on radio mentions NPR only in conjunction with “classical music programming on public radio,” crediting Public Radio International (PRI) alone for their contemporary music programming (such as ECHOES) and discussing contemporary music broadcasting primarily through European studios and electronic music. See Siegfried Goslich, et al. “Radio,” in *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42011> (accessed September 5, 2011). While NPR has indeed provided classical music and jazz programming to its member stations, these types of music have not constituted the bulk of their programming efforts, and most stations have been solely responsible for their daily musical programming.

<sup>12</sup> NPR's articles of incorporation are available online through the Public Broadcasting PolicyBase at <http://www.current.org/pbpb/documents/NPRincorp70.html>. On the inclusion of “radio” in the Public Broadcasting Act, which at one point focused solely on public television, see Jack W. Mitchell, *Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2005), 33–42.

similar approach to documentary sound continued with the work of primary creator/producer Jay Kernis in *Morning Edition (ME)* in 1979. Kernis was inspired by Edward R. Murrow's style of reporting during World War II, where "pure sound could tell a story."<sup>14</sup>

Media scholars have often noted the relationship between the sonic style of NPR's journalism and the network's founding ideals regarding the medium of radio. For instance, Susan J. Douglas cites NPR's statement of purposes to argue that it was NPR's founders' desire to "reactivate dimensional listening" that resulted in the liberal use of "background noise, sound effects, and music to enrich their stories".<sup>15</sup>

The early producers at NPR felt that most people had lost the art of listening to radio and believed that if they used sound creatively, to evoke atmosphere and feel, listeners could come again to embrace—and possibly even prefer—news on the radio.<sup>16</sup>

Yet in spite of regular scholarly assertions of the importance of sound for NPR, few writers have addressed the nature of sound on NPR in any sustained or systematic manner. Thomas Looker provides one exception, writing convincingly about the unique role of sound in NPR's radio programs and arguing that its programming "broke fresh ground and revealed possibilities latent in the medium."<sup>17</sup> He asserts:

The first generations of NPR producers and reporters learned to use their ears in addition to their voices as they painted pictures, evoked moods, told stories. These new radio artisans were reviving one of the most ancient means of communication (long before the

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<sup>13</sup> Susan J. Douglas, *Listening: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 323. See also Ralph Engelman's discussion of sound in *All Things Considered in Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1996), 95.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Collins, *National Public Radio: The Cast of Characters* (Arlington, VA: Seven Locks Press, 1993), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas, *Listening*, 286.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Looker, *The Sound and the Story: NPR and the Art of Radio* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 105.



written word, oral traditions defined a people's history and shaped their identity) and at the same time they were creating an entirely new form of expression.<sup>18</sup>

With a rich history of radio documentary and journalistic broadcasting in the U.S., it may be a stretch to declare that NPR's journalists were creating an "entirely new form of expression."<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Looker's account captures the excitement around sonic artistry frequently expressed by NPR's early employees, and his history is important because of its extended focus on sound in NPR's news magazines.

Kevin Whiteyes Shroth's research provides another notable exception, as he is concerned with the "aesthetics of radio texts."<sup>20</sup> His dissertation treats NPR news broadcasts as sonic texts for analysis, focusing not only on their author's journalistic content but also on the material sound of their narrators' spoken voices. Paul Keith Jackson, Jr. has also pursued NPR's use of evocative sound through his academic work on the network's award-winning radio drama *Earplay*. Jackson has been virtually alone in acknowledging the *musical* qualities of the ambient sounds used in radio drama on NPR, arguing:

*Earplay* differs from the conventional radio-play in which sound is primarily representational, existing primarily as an effect. In the *Earplay*, sound can exist for its own sake, it can be presentational as well as representational.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. It is fascinating that Looker draws on the very same tropes to characterize documentary reporting (ancient oral traditions and the authority of the spoken word) that composer Joan La Barbara would use in "The Oldest Instrument" (her segment of *RadioVisions*). For both Looker and La Barbara, the aural itself was simultaneously ancient/primitive (fundamentally human/natural) and novel/progressive, especially as defined against the supposedly dominant visual. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss these tropes and their roles in constructing musical experimentalism.

<sup>19</sup> On the radio documentary as a developing genre even before the 1930s, see Saul Carson, "Notes toward an Examination of the Radio Documentary," *Hollywood Quarterly* 4/1 (Autumn 1949): 69–74. For a more recent survey of radio documentary in the latter half of the twentieth century, as well as radio's continued connections to audio art, see John Biewen and Alexa Dilworth, eds., *Reality Radio: Telling True Stories in Sound* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Whiteyes Shroth, *Bakhtinian Aesthetics and Authorship in the Journalism of National Public Radio* (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2009), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Emphasis added. Paul Keith Jackson, Jr., *Investigation into Earplay, The National Public Radio Drama Production Unit 1971–1981, Toward an Aural Aesthetic in the Drama* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1983), 2. Jackson uses the definite article to accompany *Earplay* throughout his dissertation. Other notable studies on radio drama and aesthetics (although not related to NPR) include Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio*, trans. Margaret Ludwig and

For Jackson, this meant that the use of sound in *Earplay* was both theatrical and musical, providing one of the few instances where creative sound is described as musical in NPR literature.<sup>22</sup>

From a musicological perspective, on the other hand, the connection between creative sound and music had become common in the twentieth century, especially as demonstrated through composers' approaches to defining music more broadly. In the flurry of academic consideration given to NPR's journalism (and to a lesser extent, its dramatic programming), the fact that programs of radiophonic *music* were also a realization of the network's early sonic ideals has been entirely neglected. This omission has occurred in spite of the fact that NPR employees (notably William Siemering and Steve Rathe) made this link explicit in their work.

NPR's new music programming was less extensive and broadcast less regularly than its daily news and weekly drama programs.<sup>23</sup> In retrospect, news programming clearly became the dominant and even defining product for NPR; thus it has been a compelling thread for scholars to follow. Yet as a number of historians describe, NPR's eventual focus on news was by no means inevitable, and even caused significant institutional fracture in the 1980s between those who felt NPR's mandate required greater attention to non-news programming and those who wanted to

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Herbert Read (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1936), and Tim Crook, *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1999). Connections between evocative sound in radio drama and electronic music were also explored by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in its Radiophonic Workshop of 1958, where "radiophonic sound" was reimagined as "applied electronic music." See Chadabe, *Electric Sound*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *Investigation into Earplay*, 2–3.

<sup>23</sup> According to Michael P. McCauley, strong cultural programs by NPR included: "Josh Darsa's 'Man with a White Cane,' a sound-intensive documentary about a seventy-five-year-old blind man who fell off a subway platform and was nearly killed by a train; a taped musical performance series called *Concert of the Week*; live concerts by jazz artists Carmen McRae and Herbie Hancock; and dramatic presentations from the BBC, CBC, and WHA Radio in Wisconsin." McCauley suggests that "despite the quality of these programs, their intermittent scheduling precluded the development of a regular audience." See McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs of National Public Radio* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 36.

expand the network's thriving news programming.<sup>24</sup> My dissertation makes the case that despite the smaller scope of NPR's new music programming (and its cultural programming in general), the institution's focus on sound and sonic experimentation was, at times, artfully realized through innovative broadcasts dedicated to experimental and radiophonic music, including *Radio Net*, *RadioVisions*, and *Maritime Rites*.

In this dissertation, I move away from NPR's current characterization as a news giant, and return to NPR's founding documents and early programs in order to show how new music established a home on NPR in the 1970s and early 1980s. In recognizing the aesthetic experience of listening to sound, and in outlining a commitment to enhancing this experience through experimentation, the young NPR's approach to sound emphasized the importance of artistic audio innovation. Chapter 1 demonstrates that a persistent attention to experimental sound was written into NPR's statement of purposes, a consensus document drafted by William Siemering and approved by the inaugural board in 1970.<sup>25</sup> As I argue throughout the dissertation, for a number of producers and radio-savvy composers, this artistic audio innovation was realized as new music. Most importantly, in the cases of *Radio Net* and *RadioVisions*, the producers directly cited NPR's "Purposes" when promoting and explaining their pieces.

This dissertation, however, does not treat NPR's new music programming comprehensively.<sup>26</sup> Interested in better understanding the institution's relationship to the

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<sup>24</sup> See especially Collins, *National Public Radio*, 122–124; Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 75–91; and McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs of National Public Radio*, 27–29.

<sup>25</sup> William H. Siemering, "National Public Radio Purposes," National Public Broadcasting Archives, University of Maryland, Elizabeth Young Papers, Box 1, Folder 11. The "Purposes" are also archived online through the Public Radio PolicyBase (<http://www.current.org/pbpb/documents/NPRpurposes.html>).

<sup>26</sup> Chronicling all of NPR's new music programming would be a gargantuan project. Most of the archived planning materials for cultural programming are unprocessed and scattered throughout a large collection, and numerous smaller segments on new music were buried inside other NPR programs (including the popular news magazines).

category of “American experimentalism,” I chose to focus on influential shows promoting music that could be (and often was) classified as such. These shows have not been addressed elsewhere in the musicological literature or in scholarship on NPR. *Radio Net*, composed by Max Neuhaus and produced by Steve Rathe in 1977, was a work designed specifically for NPR’s distribution system. Using the network’s nationwide, round robin phone lines, listeners could make a phone call, whistle, and hear their airy sound transformed and broadcast as the odd electronic hums of *Radio Net*. NPR cancelled their news based offering for those hours, and the resulting cacophony was markedly different from the usual NPR material, demonstrating the institution’s commitment to sonic experimentation during its first decade. *Radio Net* was significant because it was a risky, live event that was billed as “music” in press releases, in spite of the fact that it would have been just as easy to market as “experimental radio.” The music of *Radio Net* was also overtly linked to the sonic experimentation of NPR’s “Purposes” through employee quotes in the publicity materials. Neuhaus was granted a surprisingly generous two hours for his piece in 1977—a time slot that would have been inconceivable for such disorienting programming even ten years later.

*RadioVisions*, broadcast nationally in the fall of 1981, was the first major series on NPR with the express purpose of introducing listeners to new music, including pieces by Laurie Anderson, Leonard Bernstein, Anthony Braxton, John Cage, Aaron Copland, Ornette Coleman, Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, Joan La Barbara, Conlon Nancarrow, Steve Reich, and Virgil Thomson. It was produced by Rathe, and featured composer/conductor Gunther Schuller as host for each of the fourteen, hour-long programs. *RadioVisions* represented a noteworthy foray into new-music programming and commissioning during a time of rapid expansion for the institution. Its broadcast showcased the sonic capabilities of NPR’s recently acquired, state-of-the-art

satellite system. The show's innovative structure merged radio documentary and experimental music, courting new listeners with its novel presentation of creative sound and information. It was also enriched with educational commentary that overtly created an on-air historical construction of musical experimentalism. *RadioVisions* represents (to my knowledge) the largest individual series on new music produced NPR during its first two decades. This series brought together an impressive number of composers and independent radio producers, yet it was conceived of, funded, produced, and distributed by NPR and bore the imprint of its parent institution. Heavily curated through narration and interviews, it also provides a unique opportunity to understand both participating composers' and NPR's roles in categorizing American experimental music.

Four years later, in the midst of restructuring due to almost-deadly debt, NPR's Satellite Program Development Fund (SPDF) funded a smaller series on new American music called *Maritime Rites*. *Maritime Rites* was a multi-part series for radio composed by Alvin Curran and based on his signature performance piece of the same title. It consisted of real-world sounds from the Eastern U.S. seaboard (foghorns, whistle buoys, waves, birds), human voices (speaking and singing), and musical improvisations by prominent members of the experimental music community in the mid-1980s (Cage, Joseph Celli, Clark Coolidge, Jon Gibson, Malcolm Goldstein, Steve Lacy, George Lewis, Leo Smith, and Pauline Oliveros). Unlike *RadioVisions*, *Maritime Rites* was not created as an NPR product; it was a live performance piece by Curran that was re-imagined as radiophonic art. The circumstances of *Maritime Rites*'s broadcast are representative of NPR's changing approach to experimental programming in the mid-1980s: the program carried less financial investment from NPR and was funded through a short-term commitment from the SPDF. The show was developed, produced, and marketed by its composer,

and thus NPR's overall role was limited. In spite of these differences, Curran's *Maritime Rites* fused experimental music and radio documentary in a way similar to *RadioVisions*. The show's documentary sound palette and its quasi-journalistic survey of the composer's new-music scene were essential both to its musical experimentalism and its snug fit as a public-radio broadcast. Curran utilized the rich link between the creative use of ambient sound and documentary broadcasting, a move that helped facilitate its funding, broadcast, and its continued musical life as a CD release.<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand each broadcast's gestation at NPR, I have undertaken extensive archival research in the Recorded Sound Collection at the Library of Congress and the Public Broadcasting Archives at the University of Maryland, and conducted original interviews with Steve Rathe and Alvin Curran. Newspaper and magazine reviews of the broadcasts, advertisements, publicity packets from NPR, liner notes for previous live performances and musical CDs, and published internal reports from NPR are also important sources for establishing the circumstances of the broadcasts' creation, distribution, and reception. Chapters 2 and 4 on *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites*, respectively, present the bulk of my findings on each shows' production histories. Historical, autobiographical, and ethnographic writings by historians, media scholars, and former NPR employees (including those already cited above) have thoroughly established NPR's institutional history, and I am greatly indebted to their work.<sup>28</sup> It is my hope that this dissertation will both contribute to a deeper understanding of

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<sup>27</sup> Alvin Curran, *Maritime Rites* (New World Records, 80625-2, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> The largest and most influential studies on NPR's history include Collins, *National Public Radio*; Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*; James Michael Haney, *A History of the Merger of National Public Radio and the Association of Public Radio Stations* (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1981); Looker, *The Sound and the Story*; Michael P. McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs of National Public Radio*; Thomas Michael McCourt, *National Public Radio and the Rationalization of the Public* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996); and Mitchell, *Listener Supported*.

NPR's history by addressing neglected cultural programs, as well as to a broader musicological understanding of the construction of musical experimentalism.

Despite the importance of these three shows, NPR's eventual specialization in news production and its position as an increasingly mainstream institution meant that it never became a committed patron of new music in America. NPR's programming became "safer" as it grew larger, and new/experimental music was certainly perceived as a risk for the institution.<sup>29</sup>

Mitchell writes about the development of NPR's *Performance Today* (a series showcasing live musical performances from concert halls) in the late 1980s, and his narrative suggests that NPR's increasing use of audience response data was partly responsible for their diminished support of contemporary art.<sup>30</sup>

The research [on *Performance Today*] trashed the program's premise that had elicited NEA support... "Listeners are fairly clear in telling us that they prefer more usual, standard, or classic classical music selections and will not react positively to using *Performance Today* as a venue for exploration of avant garde, new, or unusual selections."<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, there was a widespread sense among composers that the institution never became the strong support for new music that many had hoped it would be. For example, Curran admitted that although he was thrilled by the opportunity he was afforded in *Maritime Rites*:

I am of course very disappointed that NPR did not continue this commissioning project or open any experimental radio area for very long ... giving in, as they seemed to have done, to more middle of the road listener-boosting programming. This is pure American

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<sup>29</sup> McCourt details NPR's eventual "adoption of the marketplace model through 'unbundled' programming, an increased emphasis on reducing uncertainty through empirical audience research ... and attempts at building stable and exclusive 'core' audiences that will sustain the system." *National Public Radio and the Rationalization of the Public*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Performance Today* was created in 1987, a program based on live (classical) musical performances. See Jack W. Mitchell's account of the program's history in *Listener Supported*, 119–134. In 2007, the show moved to American Public Media and was no longer produced by NPR.

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 125.

pragmatism of course, but at the expense of a project whose potential could have inspired generations of people in the field of “radio-art.”<sup>32</sup>

Curran’s comments echo those by composers involved in *RadioVisions*, who expressed their desire for a larger commissioning role for NPR (see chapter 2). Composers—especially those who had been welcomed overseas at studios including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), or Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française—hoped that NPR would provide an American equivalent of this institutional support. Yet, according to Collins:

NPR never quite pieced together a full-fledged arts and performance division that could send out a considerable volume of high-quality programs. The critics oohed and aahed at practically everything the network did in drama, music, and specials, because the American airwaves had nothing like it. A simple comparison between England’s BBC, which often aired a thousand hours of radio drama a year, and NPR, which rarely produced more than fifty, underscores just how far American [public] radio lagged behind its European counterparts in the fields of arts and entertainment.<sup>33</sup>

In the following chapters, therefore, I am careful not to overstate NPR’s overall commitment to new music, a mistake that would contradict both the network’s record and the consensus of composers. This lack of consistent patronage, however, does not diminish the institution’s important role in commissioning, presenting, and curating new music in the 1970s and 1980s. For scholars interested in new music, and particularly those interested in discourses of musical experimentalism, NPR’s sporadic new music programming offers a fascinating example of how the category of American experimentalism has been constructed, utilized, and extended by public radio broadcasts.

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<sup>32</sup> Email interview with Curran, November 4, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Collins, *National Public Radio*, 49.



## NPR and “American Experimental Music”

In asserting that NPR provides fresh terrain for exploring the construction of musical canons and historiographic narratives, I take up an older musicological literature of canon critique penned since the 1990s, especially that of scholars dealing with discourses of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class, to determine how such discourses were relevant to the version(s) of experimentalism evinced by these radio programs.<sup>34</sup> Each broadcast represented a carefully constructed sonic moment in which experimentalism was enacted through music and commentary on air. My research sheds light on the topic of musical canon formation in broadcast media—not only as it has occurred through playlists and regular use of airtime—but also at an institutional level through commissions and programming.

The claim that institutional practices influence musical production is common in studies of popular music, as scholars have frequently noted the determining power of the music industry. Keith Negus, for example, has shown how “the creation, circulation and consumption of popular music is shaped by record companies and their corporate owners,” as well as other agents who help make what he calls “genre cultures.”<sup>35</sup> Increasingly, other studies on the business of music have begun to explore the framing practices of music industries throughout history and in many

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<sup>34</sup> See Katherine Bergeron and Philip P. Bohlman, *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, eds., *Rethinking Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Jonathan Katz, “John Cage’s Queer Silence, or How to Avoid Making Matters Worse,” *GLQ* 5/2 (1999): 232–51.

<sup>35</sup> Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3. Negus also looks at influence moving in the opposite direction, showing how “genre categories inform the organization of music companies, the creative practices of musicians and the perceptions of audiences” (3). In other words, “musical sounds and meanings are not only dependent upon the way an industry is producing culture, but are also shaped by the way in which culture is producing an industry” (13).

types of music, from publishing houses and concert halls, to the practical business of music pedagogy, to the effect of copyright.<sup>36</sup> I am also indebted to important studies that have made illuminating connections between recording practices, technology, and musical genre/style. For example, arguments advanced by Thomas Porcello, Louise Meintjes, and Tricia Rose have been influential for leading me to think differently about how institutions and technological practices are relevant to the classification of music produced.<sup>37</sup> Yet extending such research to the study of musical canons and the history of musical experimentalism, especially in relation to broadcast media, has been rare.

Two important works provide exceptions and have served as models for my work on radio and musical experimentalism. First, Jennifer Doctor's book on the BBC and "ultra-modern music" is unique in its topic and scope, as she thoroughly connects specific musical programming decisions at the BBC to the institution's cultural goals.<sup>38</sup> Second, Amy Beal's research on American experimental music in West Germany in the early 1950s includes the central role of radio in commissioning, distributing, promoting, and defining American experimental music.<sup>39</sup> In emulating their work, I aspire to present a nuanced interpretation of the

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, the essays in Michael Talbot, ed. *The Business of Music* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), and William Weber, ed., *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700–1914* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Porcello, "Tails out": Social Phenomenology and the Ethnographic Representation of Technology in Music-Making," *Ethnomusicology* 42/3 (Autumn 1998): 485–510; Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922–1936: Shaping a Nation's Tastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Beal's analysis of radio commentary has been especially helpful. For example, she shows how musicologist/host Otto Zoff's characterization of Cage accompanying a broadcast "contributed to a growing view of Cage's work as historically detached, 'oriental' music, clearly not derived from Europe" (59).

relationship between new American music and one of its institutional supports, arguing that public radio utilized existing historical narratives of musical experimentalism while simultaneously revising and strengthening those narratives. In addition to addressing and analyzing the particular representations of musical experimentalism evident in *Radio Net*, *RadioVisions*, and *Maritime Rites*, I also aim to understand *how* these specific representations came into existence. I demonstrate ways in which the shows themselves (as well as their planning phases and promotional materials) served to gather individuals and musical practices together, defining and constructing American musical experimentalism in the process.

Michael Nyman's influential book, *Experimental Music*, delineated a number of formal musical devices that defined this category, including an acceptance of the unknown during performance, the valuation of musical processes, new approaches to notation, and reimagined roles for performers.<sup>40</sup> American experimentalism has also been frequently defined against the foil of the (European) avant-garde, whose musical experiments were "conceived and executed along the well-trodden but sanctified path of the post-Renaissance tradition."<sup>41</sup> This binary of

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially pp. 1–30. Nyman's definitions relied heavily on Cage, who famously defined an "experimental action" as "one the outcome of which is not foreseen." Cage, *Silence* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 39. See also Cage, *A Year From Monday* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), and Christopher Ballantine, "Towards an Aesthetic of Experimental Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 63/2 (April 1977): 224–46. Frank X. Mauceri has also explored historical meanings given to the word "experimental"; see "From Experimental Music to Musical Experiment," *Perspectives of New Music* 35/1 (Winter 1997): 187–204.

<sup>41</sup> Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 1. Others who have written on American musical experimentalism and its relationship to the European avant-garde include Joaquim Benitez, "Avant-Garde or Experimental? Classifying Contemporary Music," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 9/1 (1978): 53–77, and David Nicholls, "Avant-Garde and Experimental Music," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. Nicholls, 517–534 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998). The opposite approach—resisting a division between the categories of "avant-garde" and "experimental"—has been fruitful as well. The essays in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) use the word "avant-garde" inclusively in order to capture the political motivations of the composers and performers discussed. Similarly, Benjamin Piekut argues that this split between "avant-garde" and "experimental" describes no essence and has been "discursively produced." Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 14, citing Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Beal, "David Tudor in Darmstadt," *Contemporary Music Review* 26/1 (February 2007): 77–88.

European avant-garde vs. American experimentalism has been an especially powerful tool for mustering a national character for the music, making experimentalism distinctly “American” against the weight of a European tradition.<sup>42</sup> Other scholars, including Catherine Cameron and Michael Broyles, have collected “American Experimentalism” according to a shared stance or set of ideals rather than solely musical/formal aspects.<sup>43</sup> Kyle Gann has further demonstrated the tendency to define experimental music according to a stance against some dominant structure by stressing “uptown/downtown” geographical/musical labels, as well as adding a hefty dose of populism to his characterization of experimentalism.<sup>44</sup>

A more convincing approach to American experimentalism has recently been proposed by Benjamin Piekut, who explains that “experimentalism is a grouping, not a group;” he argues that experimentalism is the “*result* of the discourses, practices, and institutions” that it would appear to drive.<sup>45</sup> Thus the most relevant line of inquiry becomes asking *how* such a collection of composers and musical practices occurred in the first place. My research into these radio shows’

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<sup>42</sup> On musical attempts to define an “American” music especially in the early twentieth century, see Barbara A. Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980). For an alternative approach to making experimentalism “American” (by primarily connecting Cage to contemporary U.S. Transcendental poetry), see Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998). For those who astutely realize the power of a global musical community, delineating an “authentic” American music in the twentieth century has become an increasingly limiting exercise. For example, see Barry Shank, “Productive Orientalisms: Imagining Noise and Silence Across the Pacific, 1957–1967,” in *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 45–61.

<sup>43</sup> See Catherine Cameron, *Dialectics in the Arts*, especially pp. 1–12. Michael Broyles connects the notion of the “maverick” to national identity through the music of Billings, Heinrich, and Ives. See Broyles, *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004). For another retroactive fitting of the term “experimentalism,” see David Nicholls, *American Experimental Music, 1890–1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>44</sup> See Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown*, 1–15. For a more nuanced discussion of the relationship between populism and new experimental music, and the importance of stylistic mingling and eclecticism, see Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Piekut, *Testing, Testing...: New York Experimentalism 1964* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2008), 4. See also Piekut’s revised discussion in *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 6.

histories finds that the musical/cultural aspirations of individuals, their social and professional alliances, specific institutional opportunities at NPR, funding necessities, and discursive common ground in public radio circles were among the elements that helped gather together music that was defined by its creators and promoters as both American *and* experimental. I turn a critical eye on the institutional apparatus by approaching the shows as broadcasts, as concerts, and (especially in the case of *RadioVisions*) as music-historical tutorials for public radio listeners.

Also relevant to understanding the American experimentalism of *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites* is their temporal proximity to the New Music America festivals in the early 1980s (New Music New York in 1979, and New Music America thereafter), and the ubiquitous presence of numerous composers, performers, public radio producers, and journalists who were active both in broadcasting at NPR *and* at the festivals. Through the New Music America “seminars,” as well as in the festivals’ concert selections, performance styles, and publicity materials, organizers and participants constructed American experimentalism as populist, influenced by non-Western cultures, and anti-European, a characterization extended especially in *RadioVisions*.<sup>46</sup> A number of circumstantial overlaps are relevant for my purposes: First, Rathe (who produced both *Radio Net* and *RadioVisions*) attended New Music America in 1981 and spoke to John Rockwell there about covering *RadioVisions* in the *New York Times*. Next, a live version of *Maritime Rites* was performed at New Music America in Chicago in 1982, two years before it was broadcast in Curran’s reworked form. NPR’s Satellite Program Development Fund supported multiple shows reporting on New Music America festivals, one of which was produced by Rathe. These commonalities, as well as other fortuitous circumstances addressed in the following chapters, suggest that the version of American experimentalism presented in these

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the essays in Iris Brooks, ed., *New Music Across America* (Valencia, CA: California Institute of the Arts/High Performance Books: 1992).

NPR programs was deeply connected to a broader contemporary movement within new music that was designed to bring America's new (experimental) music to its hopeful populace.

Finally, while a shared stance is inadequate for *defining* the category of American experimentalism, it remains relevant to how the category has been constructed. Similarities in discourses surrounding NPR's programming promotion and American experimentalism created common ground that facilitated the grouping of musical agents, musical acts, and musical categorization through broadcasts. This occurred largely as NPR sought to attract a national audience by projecting a marked (sonic) identity, which, in the instance of *RadioVisions*, was linked to a national experimental music. Parallel threads in discourses of public radio and experimental music did not guarantee artistic collaboration, but they certainly enabled its possibility and allowed for productive confluences in promoting the shows (as I will demonstrate in chapter 2).

First, I identify a common emphasis on the subversive power of sound; an anti-establishment (and anti-visual) characterization tied to the aural itself. Optimistically reproducing this trope in his book on NPR, Looker argues:

Yet for all the controversy within NPR [over creativity in radio], the revolutionary *aural* potential will remain always within NPRs' grasp—waiting to be used—because it is an ingredient of all radio, forever separating the medium of sound from certain dominant trends in American culture. And as much as most of NPR news programming may try to “go mainstream,” the anarchic, unpredictable magic that lurks within the creativity of radio will keep popping up so long as there is anyone around the network who is sensitive to *the sound* as well as the story.<sup>47</sup>

His narrative, which opposes radio to television and other visual media (“certain dominant trends in American culture”), links NPR's oppositional quality to *sound*. This idealism surrounding radio is an example of the value ascribed to sound's special claims to immediacy, spontaneity,

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<sup>47</sup> Looker, *The Sound and the Story*, 145. Italics in original.

and interiority, especially as measured against the ostensibly dominant visual.<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Sterne has persuasively argued that this is a culturally constructed approach to sound based on technologies and practices of listening.<sup>49</sup> Yet its prevalence is undeniable, and these magical valuations of sound have heavily influenced the musical avant-garde through the power of music's immediate aurality.

Second, a creed of anti-commercialism pervades the world of public radio, which has long defined itself against its commercial competitors.<sup>50</sup> The early history of radio as a whole in the U.S. has most often centered on the medium's "struggles with the specter of commercialism," and public radio has further taken the mantle of "the people's radio" precisely because of its non-commercial status.<sup>51</sup> I link public radio's anti-commercialism to the creation of value in musical experimentalism through the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu has argued that an economy of disavowal has been essential in generating aesthetic capital for art, and American experimentalism has proven no exception.<sup>52</sup> In chapter 2, I suggest that a

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<sup>48</sup> This powerful but problematic trope also pervades Douglas's work, which valorizes radio (especially in relation to television) precisely because it is an aural medium. See Douglas, *Listening*, especially pp. 3–21.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 14–19. Sterne describes an "audio visual litany," where hearing is characterized as interior/penetrating and vision as exterior/surface oriented. He is directly responding to the liturgical/spiritual overtones of Walter Ong's approach to hearing in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> The extent to which NPR has been able to avoid commercial influence has been frequently debated. Many argue with alarm that NPR's underwriting practices are simply commercials in (ineffective) disguise. See, for example, Marc Fisher, "The Soul of a News Machine," *The Washington Post* (October 22, 1989): W16, and Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 118.

<sup>51</sup> Whiteyes Shroth, *Bakhtinian Aesthetics and Authorship in the Journalism of National Public Radio*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For example, pronouncements of Ives's liberating "freedom" from financial concerns might also be productively read as disavowals of economic motive, as a key component in generating aesthetic capital, as Bourdieu would have it. For a standard account of Ives's liberating position as insurance salesman and its relationship to the experimental quality of his music, see Cameron, *Dialectics in the Arts*, 21.

modified version of Bourdieu's economy of disavowal has generated cultural value and prestige for NPR's programming.

The third discursive similarity is most evident in NPR's desire for a nationally coherent audience assembled from diverse local communities, and experimentalism's claims to "American" identity while simultaneously drawing significant inspiration from "non-Western" musics. Numerous scholars, including Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, John Corbett, and Martin Scherzinger, have heard a non-Western "Other" paradoxically helping to construct the category of *American* experimental music, especially in relation to their common European foil.<sup>53</sup> Building on the work of these scholars, I show how the non-Western musics, projected especially in *RadioVisions*, served to represent "Others" whose musics were used as non-European sources in a construction of "American" identity that was eclectic, diverse, and original. I will also show that this construction was useful for NPR as it sought to imagine a diverse, yet nationally unified audience through its programming.

None of these similarities between discourses of public radio broadcasting, NPR, and American experimentalism suggest that collaboration between individuals in these areas was inevitable, or serve to equate their artistic projects. The successful creation and broadcasts of *Radio Net*, *RadioVisions*, and *Maritime Rites* were made possible by multiple personal agencies and alliances, and the shows also reflect the shaping power of networks and institutions beyond NPR such as educational and journalistic institutions, as well as pedagogic, professional, and friendly relationships. Yet discursive similarities allowed for productive and revealing

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<sup>53</sup> See Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, "Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music," in *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Born and Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 1–58; John Corbett, "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others," in *Western Music and Its Others*, ed. Born and Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 163–186; and Martin Scherzinger, "'Art' Music in a Cross-Cultural Context: The Case of Africa," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 584–613.



conflations during these radio programs' planning and promotional phases. They also assisted in gathering composers, pieces, musical practices, and performers as "American experimentalists" in *Radio Net*, *RadioVisions*, and *Maritime Rites*.

### Performing Voices On Air

In *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites*, real-world sounds and recorded voices provided the crossover materials that allowed the shows to be heard as musical compositions *and* radio documentaries. The shows' unconventional presentation of voices signaled creative journalistic narration and text-sound composition: tantalizing real-world sounds were both *musique concrète* and evocative components of documentary reporting. The individual segments of *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites* constituted electro-acoustic pieces; their sound-world and compositional lineage could be traced back (through Cage, especially) to Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* and the experiments of the *Groupe de Recherches Musicales* in the first half of the twentieth century. My project helps to advance an already sophisticated musicological literature on electro-acoustic music that centers on the practice of acousmatic listening, scrutinizing the relationship between sound and source.<sup>54</sup> Acousmatic listening is, indeed, one way that recorded voices project authority: the (imagined) bodies implied by those voices provide a physical authority for their sonic partners.<sup>55</sup> However, the emerging field of critical media studies enriches such a

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<sup>54</sup> See Simon Emmerson, ed., *The Language of Electroacoustic Music* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986) and *Living Electronic Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); Luke Windsor, "Through and Around the Acousmatic: The Interpretation of Electroacoustic Sounds," in *Music, Electronic Media, and Culture*, ed. Simon Emmerson (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 7–35; and Cathy L. Cox, *Listening to Acousmatic Music* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2006). Acousmatic analysis has also informed projects focusing on the body and voice: see Hannah Bosma, "Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovoical Music," *Organised Sound* 8/1 (2003): 5–17, and Linda Dusman, "No Bodies There: Absence and Presence in Acousmatic Performance," in *Music and Gender*, ed. Pirkko Moisala and Beverly Diamond (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 336–345.

<sup>55</sup> For an enlightening explication of the acousmatic, see Carolyn Abbate's chapter "Debussy's Phantom Sounds" from *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 145–84; see especially 148–53.

lineage by untangling the acousmatic's lure. As Sterne explains, the sound/source and voice/body connection implied by recording (meaning voices "split" from the body of origin) is culturally constructed through practices of listening to various media.<sup>56</sup> By also recognizing the limits of acousmatic listening, my project privileges material sound and cultural meaning over the "splitting" properties of the technology.

The work of Katherine Norman, Cathy Lane, and Frances Dyson exemplifies analyses that attend to context and the importance of media as well as musicality.<sup>57</sup> These authors have been attuned to the vocal norms of the media in question in their analyses of electroacoustic works, from oral histories, to newscasters, to radio drama. Even in this excellent work, however, generalizations about radio's ostensibly singular "voice of authority" abound. Commercial radio is often presented as the sonic oppressor, but its sounds were seldom as monolithic as its critics claim. I aim for more specificity, attending to the norms of NPR "hosting voices," and giving special attention both to the narration curating these shows, as well as the use of voices as musical material. My analyses interpret the musical voices and real-world sounds in *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites* as sonic markers of authority. I ask how these voices and real-world sounds conveyed authority—both as radio voices/sounds and as musical voices/sounds in the specific context of NPR's programming. I propose that these authorities were important for fashioning documentary credibility as well as the versions of experimentalism presented on each show.

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<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 1–10; 217–221.

<sup>57</sup> Katharine Norman, *Sounding Art: Eight Literary Excursions through Electronic Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Cathy Lane, "Voices from the Past: Compositional Approaches to Using Recorded Speech," *Organised Sound* 11/1 (2006): 3–11; Frances Dyson, "The Genealogy of the Radio Voice," in *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound, and Transmission*, ed. Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander (Banff, Canada: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1994), 167–186.

My analyses rest on a framework of eclectic ways of hearing voices based on their contexts: I listen within the context of public radio broadcasting and specifically NPR's voices, asking what vocal norms have defined that medium and broadcasting culture; I hear the connection between voice and body as malleable and frequently imagined; and I listen for the importance of voices as *linguistic* and *communicative* presences, as the bearers of witness, and as markers of the social mind. All of these valences carry their own sorts of authority, and their various authorities are important for defining the new music of *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites* as "experimental." This dissertation shows how broadcast, musical speech collage is related to culturally constructed modes of speaking on public radio. Research on recording and "liveness" has also been especially instructive as I explore the way identities and authorities were crafted through recorded sound.<sup>58</sup> Finally, Adriana Cavarero's work on voice provides a model for listening to the sounding voice as a *relational* marker of identity, an utterance meant to be heard implying communication, dialogue, and multiple identities.<sup>59</sup> My musical analyses expand acousmatic listening to hear the voices of media establishing authority and generating meaning in these pieces. Ultimately, I demonstrate that spoken voices were integral to the creation and presentation of experimental music on NPR, connecting notions of voice to the historiography of American experimentalism.

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<sup>58</sup> See Philip Auslander, "Intellectual Property Meets the Cyborg: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Technology," *Performing Arts Journal* 14/1 (1992): 30–42; Jairo Moreno, "Body'n'Soul?: Voice and Movement in Keith Jarrett's Pianism," *Musical Quarterly* (1999) 83/1: 75–92; and Paul Sanden, "Hearing Glenn Gould's Body: Corporeal Liveness in Recorded Music," *Current Musicology* 88 (2009): 7–34.

<sup>59</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

## Chapter 1

### SONIC EXPERIMENTATION AND THE FLEDGLING NPR

NPR established its original home in Washington D.C., miles away from the booming musical activities of downtown New York City. Yet its founders' approach to the sonic medium of radio paved a road that would link the newborn NPR to the experimental music heard over two hundred miles to the northeast. Such a connection—between radio, sound, and the (musical) avant-garde—had been previously explored in the work of various independent radio producers, composers, and sound artists.<sup>1</sup> It was unusual, however, that the founders of a nationwide, publicly funded network would so thoroughly contemplate *sound* as the defining and branding aspect of their broadcasts. In recognizing the aesthetic experience of listening to sound, and in outlining a commitment to enhancing this experience through experimentation, the young NPR's approach to sound emphasized the importance of artistic audio innovation.

In this chapter, I parse the influential “National Public Radio Purposes” written by William Siemering, NPR's first Director of Programming, to outline the ways in which both the aesthetic experience of sound and radiophonic experimentation were privileged in this brief but powerful document. I propose that Siemering characterized radio as more than just a neutral carrier for sound, and that this characterization had meaningful implications for the possibility for new music at NPR. Next, I turn to Max Neuhaus's musical composition *Radio Net* (produced by Steve Rathe in 1977), whose production was the subject of a short documentary film released by Broadside Television in 1977, as well as extensive commentary by the composer archived at

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, eds., *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994); Dan Lander and Micah Lexier, *Sound by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990); and Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander, eds., *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound, and Transmission* (Banff, Alta., Canada: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1994).

the kunstradio website.<sup>2</sup> Rather than recounting the piece's production history, I address it as a concise example of how the ideals laid out in NPR's "Purposes" were realized by a composer/producer team. Unlike the later shows *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites* (the subjects of chapters 2 through 5), which featured documentary sound as their radiophonic cross-over material, *Radio Net* hinged on radio's potential for liveness and listener participation. In *Radio Net*, Neuhaus treated NPR's distribution system—the medium of public radio itself—as an instrument. A number of factors, including NPR's eventual turn away from large-scale cultural programming toward investigative journalism,<sup>3</sup> as well as its increased reliance on audience response data and its competition with commercial stations,<sup>4</sup> meant that the potential for experimental sonic collaboration suggested in the "Purposes" was not realized extensively. Yet the work of Siemering, Rathe, and Neuhaus paved the way for other significant experimental music broadcasts, and helped build discursive inroads that allowed NPR to play a limited but significant role in constructing musical experimentalism.

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<sup>2</sup> *RadioNet*, Broadside Television, produced and directed by Margaret Gregg, 1977. Available online at <http://www.max-neuhaus.info/audio-video/audio-video.htm>. See also Neuhaus's writings on *Radio Net* archived at <http://www.kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/CATALOG/ENGLISH/neuhaus2b-e.html>.

<sup>3</sup> According to McCauley, even as early as 1974, NPR's "amount of news and information programming rose to 70 percent [up from 59 percent in FY 1973]—at the direct expense of arts programs." Patrick Michael McCauley, *From the Margins to the Mainstream: The History of National Public Radio* (Ph.D. diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997), 152.

<sup>4</sup> On the increased use of audience response data at NPR in the 1980s and the institution's concurrent growth, see Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 117–119, and Jack W. Mitchell, *Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2005), 145–147.

## Siemering and New Music at WBFO-FM

William Siemering's presence has dominated accounts of NPR's early history because of his enormous influence on the institution. He was a member of NPR's first board of directors, which, before the network's incorporation, had served as its planning board. While serving on the planning board, Siemering drafted the "National Public Radio Purposes" (hereafter "Purposes").<sup>5</sup> Donald Quayle, NPR's first president, hired Siemering as the new head of NPR's programming operations in part because of his authorship of the "Purposes." Quayle hoped he could help Siemering to "transform some of the nobler aspects of the network's mission statement into compelling radio programs."<sup>6</sup> McCauley asserts that Siemering's "strongest talent lay in translating ideals from outside the world of broadcasting—from artistic and social critics, in particular—into recommendations for the sort of programs that NPR was aiming to produce."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as I will show below, the "Purposes" included many passages revealing Siemering's interest in the world of contemporary art and music.

Siemering had plenty of broadcasting experience under his belt. Previously, he had worked for eight years as manager for WBFO-FM at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he pioneered *This is Radio*, a talk radio program that hosted peoples' opinions

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<sup>5</sup> William H. Siemering, "National Public Radio Purposes," National Public Broadcasting Archives, University of Maryland, Elizabeth Young Papers, Box 1, Folder 11 (hereafter NPBA EYP). The "Purposes" are also archived online through the Public Radio PolicyBase (<http://www.current.org/pbpb/documents/NPRpurposes.html>). For another account of NPR's early organization and Siemering's authorship of the "Purposes," see James Michael Haney, *A History of the Merger of National Public Radio and the Association of Public Radio Stations* (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1981), 61–63.

<sup>6</sup> McCauley strongly links Siemering's authorship of the "Purposes" to his successful hire as programming director in his history of the early institution, and corroborates this through statements by Jack Mitchell and Elizabeth Young in interviews (available in the Michael McCauley NPR Oral History Collection, National Public Broadcasting Archives, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park). See McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 25–26.

<sup>7</sup> McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 26.

(among other topics) on the 1970 student strike.<sup>8</sup> He was passionate about radio as a democratic medium, and established a storefront location on Jefferson Avenue in Buffalo for WBFO, where “African American and Hispanic residents produced 25 hours of programming a week.”<sup>9</sup> His populist approach to radio at WBFO was strongly evident in NPR’s “Purposes.”<sup>10</sup>

Most historians of NPR point to Siemering’s time at WBFO as formative, especially noting his democratic approach to radio that would carry over to NPR. Less often discussed, but equally important, was Siemering’s work on notable musical/radiophonic productions at WBFO, which added to his experience with avant-garde arts and demonstrated his open approach to music and sound. In 1967, he collaborated on a piece with composer Maryanne Amacher (then in residence at the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts at SUNY Buffalo) called *City Links*.<sup>11</sup> This was a large-scale project: twenty-eight hours of ambient sound from the city were broadcast to its inhabitants uninterrupted. Microphones were placed at eight locations in Buffalo, and fed into the WBFO studio where Amacher mixed their signals in real time. Siemering said,

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<sup>8</sup> For more on UB’s extensive student conflicts during the spring of 1970, see Ann Whitcher, “A Stormy Spring,” *UB Today* (Winter 2005), [http://www.buffalo.edu/UBT/UBT-archives/28\\_ubtw05/features/](http://www.buffalo.edu/UBT/UBT-archives/28_ubtw05/features/) (accessed March 6, 2012). Siemering’s *This is Radio* eventually became *Fresh Air*. For other accounts of Siemering’s tenure at WBFO-FM see Noah Adams, “Cue the Opening Theme,” in *This is NPR: The First Forty Years* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books 2010), 22–23; McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 26; and especially Marc Fisher, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution that Shaped a Generation* (New York: Random House, 2007) 172–176.

<sup>9</sup> Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 90. See also “Storefront Radio Experiment Expanded In Buffalo Ghetto” *The Sun* (September 8, 1969): 5.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Violanti, “Simmering ‘60s Fueled Creativity of Siemering,” *Buffalo News* (May 9, 2001) <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/381501964?accountid=10226> (accessed September 16, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> See a description of the project by Renée Levine Packer, *This Life of Sounds: Evenings for New Music in Buffalo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60–61. The only other account of this event I have located in NPR scholarship (excepting Fischer, *Something in the Air*) is in Mary Collins’s book, where she cites *City Links* as influential for Siemering but neglects to mention its connections to new music, omitting Amacher’s name and calling it a “radio experiment” rather than a musical endeavor. See Collins, *National Public Radio: The Cast of Characters* (Arlington, VA: Seven Locks Press, 1993), 18. There is a discrepancy on the piece’s original year, as Amacher’s obituary in the *New York Times* and various other sources date the Buffalo broadcast in 1967, also listing subsequent versions of the piece in Boston and New York. See Allan Kozinn, “Maryanne Amacher, 71, Visceral Composer, Dies,” *New York Times* (October 28, 2009). Levine Packer’s book lists the date as 1968.

“It was a John Cage idea, that everything can be musical...so you had this feeling of being connected to the city and its sounds.”<sup>12</sup> *City Links* was favorably received, and was granted a prestigious Ohio State Award (a high honor in educational broadcasting).<sup>13</sup> Siemering’s participation in the project revealed his penchant for audio experiment, and demonstrated his previous experience with innovative new music programming as well as his familiarity with Cagian conceptions of sound and music. In fact, Siemering had also broadcast coverage of numerous contemporary music events at the University of Buffalo while at WBFO, interviewed a number of the university’s Creative Associates, and recorded their recitals.<sup>14</sup> These interviews, as well as his collaboration with Amacher, influenced his imagination of the new sound that NPR’s founders would strive to create, and they show that music was indeed one facet of his audio experimentalism.<sup>15</sup>

Given the extent of his influence both as a planner and early employee, it is perhaps surprising that Siemering had a very short tenure at NPR. He was fired in 1972. Siemering’s dismissal was abrupt, and according to McCauley, Siemering “remains puzzled to this day about the precise reasons for his dismissal.”<sup>16</sup> Mitchell notes an ironic timing to the event, as Siemering was released only a few months before NPR won its first Peabody Award for *All Things*

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<sup>12</sup> Siemering, quoted in Marc Fischer, *Something in the Air*, 172.

<sup>13</sup> Jack Allen, “SUNYAB Campus Radio Station Provides Coverage for Festival of the Arts,” *Buffalo Courier Express* (March 3, 1968).

<sup>14</sup> According to Levine Packer’s account, “At WBFO-FM, the university radio station which was originally located adjacent to the CAs’ rehearsal room in Baird Hall, a congenial fellow named Bill Siemering interviewed them and recorded their recitals for broadcast.” Levine Packer, *This Life of Sounds*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Siemering himself cited the project with Amacher as representative of the “experimentation and risk taking” that was typical at WBFO, and he opined that this sort of approach to sound and experiment would transfer to the early NPR. See “Bill Siemering: Radio Executive Producer, *SoundPrint*, and Creator of NPR’s *All Things Considered*,” in *The Broadcast Century and Beyond: A Biography of American Broadcasting*, 5th ed., by Robert L. Hilliard and Michael C. Keith (Burlington, MA: Elsevier Science, 2010), 211.

<sup>16</sup> McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 32.



*Considered*, Siemering's brainchild.<sup>17</sup> Yet McCauley also notes multiple problems preceding Siemering's exit from NPR, including a culture clash within the institution in which Siemering had played a large role: "The decision to hire Siemering as program director was difficult because he brought a 1960s mentality to an organization whose top managers were men of the 1950s—with all that this implied about conservatism in programming."<sup>18</sup> He also argues that Siemering's "young, eclectic programming staff, possessed of widely varying experience and an attitude to boot, often grated against the psyches of people in other departments."<sup>19</sup> Collins also writes about a conflict at NPR with "two sides" that "couldn't even see eye-to-eye on simple things like job titles and dress codes."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, numerous early employees have related that Siemering was "ineffectual in carrying out personnel functions," had an "inability to delegate creative tasks," and often failed to deliver a reliable daily news program.<sup>21</sup> NPR historians concur that Siemering served primarily as a creative force during NPR's early days, and that his managing skills were not adequate for the network's needs.<sup>22</sup> President Quayle had attempted to keep Siemering at NPR in a creative role in spite of these problems, enlisting Joseph Gwathmey to execute the programming generated by Siemering's leadership. Yet Quayle ultimately decided that this model was unsustainable, especially given the stressful time-crunch involved in producing NPR's daily news magazine, *All Things Considered*. Ironically, the same

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<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Collins, *National Public Radio*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 30–31.

<sup>22</sup> For more accounts of Siemering's abrupt departure from NPR, see McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 26–33; Adams, "Cue the Opening Theme," 22–23; Collins, *National Public Radio*, 31–32; and Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 99–100.

visionary spirit Siemering displayed in the “Purposes” (fully embraced by the institution) resulted in daily operational conflicts that ultimately led to his departure. Siemering has continued to work in public radio with a distinguished career, most notably (and not surprisingly, given his previous experience) on the award-winning documentary series *Soundprint*.<sup>23</sup> It is no overstatement, however, when McCauley credits Siemering with giving “the network its very soul.”<sup>24</sup> Such laudatory statements make sense given Siemering’s extensive influence on his staff and later NPR employees, as well as the heady and lingering language of the “Purposes.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Sound and NPR’s “Purposes”**

The “Purposes” established goals for NPR by centering on the listener’s experience. The document began with rousing prose:

National Public Radio will serve the individual: it will promote personal growth; it will regard the individual differences among men with respect and joy rather than derision and hate; it will celebrate the human experience as infinitely varied rather than vacuous and banal; it will encourage a sense of active constructive participation, rather than apathetic helplessness.<sup>26</sup>

This passage is full of polarized extremes (“respect and joy” vs. “derision and hate;” “infinitely varied” vs. “vacuous and banal”), which capture its author’s passion and his forceful attempt to

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<sup>23</sup> Soundprint was founded in 1988, with a goal to produce programs that “use the sound medium as an art form to engage the listener’s imagination and enhance the telling of a story.” See <http://soundprint.org/radio/produce.php>. For a list of Soundprint’s awards see <http://soundprint.org/radio/awards.php>. Siemering continued to influence NPR in other capacities, subsequently serving on NPR’s board of directors (elected as a petition candidate), as well as on the advisory staff for NPR’s Satellite Program Development Fund. See Collins, *National Public Radio*, 32.

<sup>24</sup> McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Looker includes Jay Kernis’s recollection of the early days at NPR, where Kernis specifically quotes Siemering’s “Purposes” as defining the institution for him. See Thomas Looker, *The Sound and the Story: NPR and the Art of Radio* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 105–106. Siemering is also featured prominently in many of the anecdotes from early employees in NPR’s retrospective promotional volume, *This is NPR: The First Forty Years* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> “Purposes,” NPBA EYP, 1.

define the institution's values. It is frequently quoted in literature on NPR. Yet it was Siemering's means for achieving these goals that was most musically significant: Siemering identified broadcast *sound* as the key to creating this experience for the listener.

The "Purposes" moved quickly from the practical aspects of NPR's service to the listeners' *experience* of the "sound medium":

National Public Radio, through live interconnection and other distribution systems, will be the primary national non-commercial program service. Public radio stations will be a source for programming input as well as program dissemination. The potentials of live interconnection will be exploited, the art and the enjoyment of the sound medium will be advanced.<sup>27</sup>

While the above passage allowed for radio's role as distributor, it also marked the medium itself as a sonic entity—most notably as a sonic entity that would be artistically exploited for aesthetic appreciation ("the art and enjoyment of the sound medium will be advanced"). Siemering used the phrase "the sound medium" interchangeably with "radio" throughout the "Purposes." Siemering's mention of radio's potential for "live interconnection" is a theme explored later by Neuhaus and Rathe in *Radio Net*.

After establishing radio as the "sound medium," the "Purposes" continued by addressing the role of the network's non-news programming:

In its cultural mode, National Public Radio will preserve and transmit the cultural past, will encourage and broadcast the work of contemporary artists and provide listeners with an aural esthetic experience which enriches and gives meaning to the human spirit.<sup>28</sup>

In these three clauses, Siemering provided a list where the third item was truly radical. NPR would (1) "preserve and transmit the cultural past"; (2) "encourage and broadcast the work of contemporary artists"; and (3) "*provide listeners with an aural esthetic experience which*

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

*enriches and gives meaning to the human spirit.*” This statement directed NPR’s role in developing its own unique “aural esthetic experience.” While another reading is possible (namely that NPR would provide this aural esthetic experience *through* broadcasting the work of artists), the appendix to the “Purposes” (discussed below) laid out Siemering’s commitment to the more radical option. The appendix shows that Siemering was indeed calling for NPR’s creative participation in producing new radiophonic art. Thus Siemering saw NPR influencing not only the continuation of, but also the very shape of contemporary (sonic) art.

Siemering concluded the first section of the “Purposes” by again mentioning this desired “aural esthetic experience,” arguing that:

The total service should be trustworthy, enhance intellectual development, expand knowledge, deepen aural esthetic enjoyment, increase the pleasure of living in a pluralistic society and result in a service to listeners which makes them more responsive, informed human beings and intelligent responsible citizens of their communities and the world.<sup>29</sup>

In the context of this passage, Siemering emphasized NPR’s role as educator by listing a deeper “aural esthetic enjoyment” alongside the network’s goals for enhanced “intellectual development” and expanded “knowledge” that would result in “informed human beings and intelligent responsible citizens.” Sound (and a deeper aural esthetic enjoyment of it) was the means by which the world would be changed. Siemering was using sound as a socio-political tool for progress, a tactic common in the 1960s musical avant-garde.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1–2.

<sup>30</sup> The importance of social and political progress in notions of the avant-garde stems both from Saint-Simon’s early use of the term (*Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles*, 1829), as well as from later critical work, for example Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968). While many musicological approaches to the twentieth-century avant-garde have focused on composers’ “disavowal of issues of social and political concern,” and concomitant turn toward form and materials, Robert Adlington’s edited collection on the 1960s amply demonstrates the “intense political involvement of many avant-garde musicians in the tumultuous cultural and political developments of the sixties.” Adlington, “Introduction: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties,” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

The “Purposes” proceeded with a list of priorities for programming, as well as ideas for implementing these priorities. The third priority of “NPR program development” was to “acquire and produce cultural programs which [could] be scheduled individually by stations.”<sup>31</sup> Siemering argued for the importance of NPR’s commitment to cultural programming by quoting Susan Sontag: “Art today is a new kind of instrument, an instrument for modifying consciousness and organizing sensibility.”<sup>32</sup> If one substitutes the word “radio” for “art” in Sontag’s sentence, it is easy to see how this sentiment was at the very heart of NPR’s “Purposes.” Siemering’s first two paragraphs of the “Purposes” demonstrated that he conceived of radio as an “instrument for modifying consciousness and organizing sensibility,” and his use of Sontag’s writing is not surprising given the critic’s passionate arguments for celebrating the visceral experience of art. Years later, Siemering reiterated the connection between radio and his social goals: “You couldn’t be alive [at that time] and not be aware of the cultural ferment...We weren’t political radicals, but we were radicals for our medium. I was clearly seeing radio as an agent of social change.”<sup>33</sup> Siemering’s vote of confidence in the political power of sound was shared at the time by numerous contemporary composers; as Robert Adlington has explained, “there was a widespread conviction [among avant-garde musicians in the 1960s] that aesthetic experiment and social progressiveness made natural bedfellows.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “Purposes,” NPBA EYP, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 296. Quoted by Siemering, “Purposes,” NPBA EYP, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Fisher, *Something in the Air*, 176. Here Siemering is discussing the atmosphere at UB as well as his drafting of NPR’s founding documents.

<sup>34</sup> Adlington, “Introduction: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties,” 5.

Siemering moved directly from the Sontag quotation to emphasize the “role of radio as a *creator* and a transmitter” for the arts, as well as proposing NPR’s role as curator for the arts:

Art is no longer a pleasant pastime for a social elite, but at the core of contemporary life. Understanding is both more essential and more difficult. Without adequate background, the artist’s message is frequently unintelligible and we wander as one in the forest unfamiliar with trail markings, unable to “read” the environment. With the rapidity of change and decline of local theaters and orchestras there is an equal need to preserve and transmit the culture of the past. As the arts become less of a social occasion and more of a personal experience, the role of radio as a creator and transmitter should increase.<sup>35</sup>

By contrasting a “pleasant pastime” with an experience at “the core of contemporary life,” he reproduced a predilection for the aesthetic experience everyday life that has been essential for many avant-garde artists. The excerpt also reinforces Siemering’s populist approach to art and, by extension, his hope for the widespread appeal of NPR’s programs: an experience at the “core of contemporary life” is relevant to everyone, as opposed to merely a social elite. While remaining concerned with preserving and transmitting the “culture of the past” in this passage, Siemering also looked forward, again linking radio to contemporary art. By clarifying that the arts were “a personal experience,” he brought “the arts” closer to the ostensibly interior experience of listening to radio—a ubiquitous medium suitable for easy incorporation into the patterns of daily life.<sup>36</sup> His argument that “the artist’s message” was “frequently unintelligible” made it possible for NPR to serve as a cultural guide.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Purposes,” NPBA EYP, 7.

<sup>36</sup> On the often-repeated trope of listening’s interiority (as opposed to the exteriority of the visual), as well as the cultural origins of this idealized hearing, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 14–19.

<sup>37</sup> This role for NPR as “guide to the artist’s message” runs counter to Sontag’s main argument in *Against Interpretation*, in spite of Siemering’s quotation of her work. Sontag famously called for an “erotics of art,” without the burden of content-based criticism, under which Siemering’s idea of explaining the artist’s message would likely fall.

The seventh priority of “NPR program development” established the network’s artistic commitment to experimental *radio*: NPR would “produce materials specifically intended to develop the art and technical potential of radio.”<sup>38</sup> Siemering suggested that the improved art of radio would be achieved through “a close working relationship with the National Center for Audio Experimentation at the University of Wisconsin to apply the principles discovered there to the art of broadcasting.”<sup>39</sup> The National Center for Audio Experimentation at the University of Wisconsin (funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting) was focused on (among other projects) stereo production.<sup>40</sup> The center also published a newsletter including reports from other centers dealing with sound (including musical sound).<sup>41</sup> Although the Center is now defunct, Siemering’s reference to it as a resource aligned the newborn NPR with another institution that professed both an artistically inclusive and technologically cutting-edge approach to sound.

The seventh priority of the “Purposes” again identified sound as the material of radio while underscoring the importance of quality of sound and its distribution:

Improving the art of the sound medium should be an on-going concern at the production center just as newspapers and magazines constantly improve the format and appearance of their medium. The technical staff will be concerned with new developments in studio and remote equipment and the transmission of material by satellite. National Public Radio should utilize the most advanced techniques of the medium, should introduce new concepts and have the highest technical standards in the field.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Purposes,” NPBA EYP, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Bill Siemering, “A Short History of Threads in Transitions,” AIRblast (December 2010), <http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=617>.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Morris, “The Yale Electronic Music Studio,” National Center for Audio Experimentation Newsletter IV/7 (1974).

<sup>42</sup> “Purposes,” NPBA EYP, 14.

While the passage reveals a basic commitment to pursuing sound quality, it also highlights the potential of the medium. When comparing the pursuit of sonic excellence to that of stellar “format and appearance” in print media, Siemering again referred to improving these elements as improving the “*art* of the sound medium.” The mode and quality of transmission was inseparable from the content of broadcast.

In the same section (expanding priority seven), Siemering made his most overt case for connecting sound to the institution’s broader cultural goals. He included the following quote by Godfrey Featherstone, from an article in the British publication *Anarchy*:

Using sounds alone, with no imposed pictures or rigid, linear print tending to fragment and narrow thought processes and imagination, can stimulate a habit of thinking in terms of dynamic complexes of ideas or far-reaching constellations or “fields” of imagery. Sound can tap the flow and structures of feelings of ordinary people if they speak directly for themselves about their lives’ central experiences in actuality is made fuller, complex, concrete through the tone, pace, rhythm, and stress of their speech...<sup>43</sup>

Notice Featherstone’s focus on the potential of sound to depict the “real” and to access personal experience. Siemering’s use of this quote in the “Purposes” clearly connects the use of broadcast documentary sound to the cultural progressivism in his work and bears a strong resemblance to Cagian notions of sound (both broadly speaking, and specifically as Siemering described his understanding of Amacher’s project). Adlington argues that similar values (“immediacy and spontaneity”) regarding sound appealed to post-Cagian experimentalists:

John Cage’s well-established commitment to erasing the boundaries separating life and art—a commitment shared with the early twentieth-century avant-garde—inspired new generations of musicians, for whom the values of immediacy and spontaneity offered a point of connection with youth counterculture, and who viewed performative freedoms,

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<sup>43</sup> Godfrey Featherstone, “Radio Freedom—an Anarchist Approach,” *Anarchy* 93 (“Radio Freedom”) 8/11 (November 1968): 335, quoted in Siemering, “Purposes,” NPBA EYP, 14–15. Featherstone’s article advocates for practical, “anarchist” responses to what he perceives as the “authoritarian” nature of the BBC. He notes Pacifica radio in the U.S. as a positive alternative.



collaborative creative processes, and audience participation as consonant with the antiauthoritarian and democratizing movements of the era.<sup>44</sup>

For NPR to achieve this immediacy and spontaneity, at least in Siemering's formulation, the network would need to *create* sound as well as transmit it.

The "Purposes" were appended by a document titled "National Public Radio as a Cultural Resource."<sup>45</sup> In it, Siemering reasserted that art was a populist endeavor, and he positioned this art against the foil of commercialism:

The arts are no longer the exclusive province of the intellectual elite; there is renewed interest in the arts as a source of minority identity. Surrounded by commercial blight, there is an increasing awareness of the need for an esthetic experience which refreshes the human spirit.<sup>46</sup>

Siemering saw "the arts" as an "esthetic experience" that would be a remedy for "commercial blight." Public radio was founded as an alternative to commercial radio, and, as I will argue in chapter 2, this common "enemy" of commercialism was useful for further connecting public radio to the arts. By expressing "interest in the arts as a source of minority identity," he foreshadowed the quest for projecting minority identities on air that would later occupy many an NPR producer. Siemering then called for artists to consider working specifically in the medium of radio:

Serious writers and artists should come to regard National Public Radio as a place where their ideas can find expression in a valid effective medium, just as they have come to view film in recent years.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Adlington, "Introduction," *Sound Commitments*, 4–5.

<sup>45</sup> There are three appendices to the "Purposes": "Educational Radio: An Historical Perspective," "National Public Radio as a Cultural Resource," and "National Public Radio as an Instructional Resource." NPBA EYP.

<sup>46</sup> Siemering, "National Public Radio as a Cultural Resource," NPBA EYP, 25.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

He did not merely request that artists should present their work over NPR's newly available airwaves; he requested that they consider using the medium of radio as their very mode of expression. This rhetorical turn made space for artistic sonic expression that was both musical and uniquely radiophonic.

In the Appendix to the "Purposes," Siemering again turned to Sontag, citing her argument about an emerging "non-literary culture" to insist that "radio must accommodate the revolution in arts today, think in new modalities and involve new artists."<sup>48</sup> Finally, Siemering concluded the Appendix by describing an avant-garde approach to radio that celebrated the immediacy and ubiquity of the sonic medium:

Radio should also develop its own forms of unique esthetic experience. Unlike any cultural institution it can bring individuals in daily contact with classical music and introduce them to new aural artistic experiences in their own homes. If, as McLuhan says, the artist is an early warning system to society, he should be given access to the people through a medium which gives full expression to the reason, intellect, and emotions of living art.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Siemering argued for the development of a new radiophonic art while reinforcing the continued relevance of classical music; he argued for the intimacy of the sonic genre as part of its power ("new aural artistic experiences in their own homes"); and he suggested that radio was a means by which artists could "access the people."

The "Purposes" served as an artistic and institutional manifesto for NPR. The document's emphasis on contemporary art, the political relevance of sound, and the spontaneity and immediacy of sound revealed Siemering's link to the post-war musical avant-garde, especially Cagian ideas regarding sound. But more than this, the language of the document served as a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 27. Siemering was quoting Susan Sontag, *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*, edited by Gerald Stern (Signet, New York: The New American Library, 1967), 252–253.

<sup>49</sup> "National Public Radio as a Cultural Resource," NPBA EYP, 27.

discursive foundation that could encourage programming on experimental musical sound. Specifically, as I will demonstrate below and in chapter 2, the “Purposes” would later provide justification for producer Steve Rathe’s attempts to bring unconventional new music programming to a national audience.<sup>50</sup>

An awareness of radio as a “sonic medium” and a subsequent focus on radiophonic art were not unique to Siemering’s “Purposes,” and indeed were prevalent throughout the world of public and educational radio in the U.S.<sup>51</sup> Jack Mitchell sees the focus on radiophonic art, as well as several other key points in the “Purposes,” as “more predictable elements reflecting board members’ interests in radio production as an art form, in drama and music, in excellent broadcast journalism, in universities as the source for expert opinion, and in high technical standards.”<sup>52</sup> Siemering’s own experience with new music programming at WBFO demonstrated that local public and university stations were often able and willing to take risks that NPR would not be willing to take for long. Perhaps the most notable examples of radiophonic experimentation (especially in the late 1960s) were two thriving Pacifica stations: KPFA in Berkeley and WBAI in New York. Pacifica Radio, the first public radio network in the U.S., has been famous for its progressive, left-leaning, and even radical politics since its inception, especially as defined

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<sup>50</sup> Steve Rathe quoted the “Purposes” in a press release for *Radio Net* (John Rockwell, “Whistle While You Tune In To Avant-Garde Radio,” *New York Times*, January 2, 1977); in the grant materials for *RadioVisions*; and during *RadioVisions*’s first episode, “The Challenge.” I will address these instances in more detail below and in chapter 2.

<sup>51</sup> European radio stations played a much larger and more established role in shaping twentieth-century music by providing institutional support for composers. Examples include the work of the Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète (GRMC) at the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) and the Studio für Elektronische Musik at Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) in Cologne. The electronic music studios in the U.S. tended to be university-based rather than radio-based (for example, the San Francisco Tape Music Center which was eventually housed at the University of California, San Diego, and the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Studio).

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 55. Mitchell sees these goals as “associated with the public-service tradition of the BBC and educational radio.”

against the paranoia of McCarthyism.<sup>53</sup> Although its earliest programs may not have sounded radical in their delivery, by the 1960s the turbulence of street activism and the civil rights movement was reflected in their broadcasts.<sup>54</sup> KPFA (Berkeley) broadcast a stunning array of new music and experimental programming in the 1960s, from concerts of works by John Cage, Lou Harrison, Morton Feldman, to a recorded audio tour of the San Diego zoo by Pauline Oliveros. In 1970, KPFA established a regular, hourly program of ambient sound called the World Ear Project.<sup>55</sup> Charles Amirkhanian (co-host with Richard Friedman) explained, “The idea [was] to familiarize listeners with sound as an international language and also to isolate seemingly ‘non-musical’ or ‘everyday’ sounds so that they might be perceived in an exhibition-like setting.”<sup>56</sup> The World Ear Project presented public radio as an experimental medium that could function both as a frame for displaying “everyday” sounds (a mode for setting sonic events apart from their surroundings) and as a community-building medium, where listeners could participate by submitting material. Preceding the World Ear Project was Mike Sahl’s show

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<sup>53</sup> See Matthew Lasar, “‘Right out in Public’: Pacifica Radio, the Cold War, and the Political Origins of Alternative Media,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 67/4 (November 1998): 513–541. In his book on Pacifica radio, Jeff Land also characterizes the origins of the network as oppositional, arguing that the station’s emphasis on the First Amendment shows “the particular Anglo-American libertarian tradition within which Pacifica situates itself, one that champions dissent (‘rebellious instincts’) as the lifeblood of Democracy.” Land, *Active Radio: Pacifica’s Brash Experiment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>54</sup> On the essentially academic, “highbrow” approach of early Pacifica Radio, especially in music programming, see Matthew Lasar, “Hybrid Highbrow: The Pacifica Foundation and KPFA’s Reconstruction of Elite Culture, 1946–1963,” *Journal of Radio Studies* 5/1 (1998): 49–67. Also see Jack W. Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 22–23.

<sup>55</sup> Notably, The San Francisco Tape Music Center moved to 321 Divisadero Street in San Francisco for three years in the 1960s where they shared an auditorium with the radio station KPFA. See David W. Bernstein, “The San Francisco Tape Music Center: Emerging Art Forms and the American Counterculture, 1961–1966,” in *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Amirkhanian, “Radical Aesthetics and Sound Sensitivity Information” (July, 1973), <http://radiom.org/radical-aesthetics.php>.

“Sounds” on WBAI (New York) in the late 1960s, which was also based on ambient sound.<sup>57</sup> In addition to regular concerts of new music and coverage of city events, WBAI broadcast Max Neuhaus’s *Public Supply I* in 1966, one of the composer’s early radio pieces that was also a precursor for *Radio Net*.

These Pacifica stations, as well as numerous educational and local stations, realized the (musical) artistic potential of the medium of radio much more fully than NPR would, and meant that Siemering was not the lone voice promoting new music programming on public radio. His sonic ideals were shared by a much larger community of public radio producers. NPR’s “Purposes” stand out not only because of their content, but because they were adopted by a national, now mainstream organization. It was unusual to find values so attuned to the aesthetic experience of sound, the substance of the radio medium, and contemporary art in this publicly funded, centralized programming institution. I turn now to a specific instance early in NPR’s history when these values were realized through new-music programming.

### **Experimental Sound On Air: *Radio Net* by Max Neuhaus**

Seven years after the “Purposes” were adopted, and five years after Siemering’s firing, NPR employee Steve Rathe produced a piece by composer Max Neuhaus called *Radio Net*. After joining NPR in 1974, Rathe was responsible for a number of highly successful programs, including *Jazz Alive!* and *The American Music Sampler*, and he established the “Contemporary Music/Events Unit” at NPR.<sup>58</sup> Before coming to NPR, Rathe worked as a recording engineer at

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<sup>57</sup> A portion of *Sounds*, which included an excerpt from a 1968 concert by the experimental improvisatory group Musica Elettronica Viva, was rebroadcast as part of transmission nine of the World Ear Project in May, 1971. An archived recording of this broadcast is available online at <<http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=WEP.1971.05.26.A>>.

<sup>58</sup> This Unit was created by Rathe for the purpose of supporting his programming, and appears to be defunct since Rathe’s departure from NPR in 1981.

WBAI in New York City (the Pacifica station known for its broadcasts of new music), as well as with Ilhan Mimaraglou and Vladimir Ussachevsky at the Princeton-Columbia Electronic Music Center. Neuhaus had proposed *Radio Net* to NPR in 1973, only three years after the institution's incorporation. With Rathe's help as producer, Neuhaus's piece was eventually presented by NPR in 1977.

In *Radio Net*, the composer's instrument was NPR's distribution system. The breath of the instrument was provided by callers, who were invited to phone in and whistle a single tone. At the time, NPR used telephone lines that connected their 200 member stations into a huge loop called a "round robin." A member station could deliver programming to the other stations by opening the loop and then sending their programming. Neuhaus noticed that "it was possible to make the loop itself into a sound-transformation circuit," and used it for modulation and amplification of the callers' whistles at the same time they were broadcast.<sup>59</sup> The resulting sound of circulating whistles was described by one reviewer as "a surrealistic concert of wind sounds and patterns of rhythm."<sup>60</sup> It was also described by a less satisfied listener as "a cross between a freight train with flat wheels and a herd of elephants stampeding through a belly-high stand of grass."<sup>61</sup> Concert or stampede, it clearly represented a sonic departure from NPR's regular programming. Language was removed from the equation, and the whistled sounds were highly modulated, even unrecognizable in their new form.

The piece was based on Neuhaus's earlier broadcast compositions for local radio stations: *Public Supply I* aired in 1966, and was realized at WBAI in New York City, and *Public Supply II*

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<sup>59</sup> Max Neuhaus, "The Broadcast Works: Radio Net" (no date listed), <http://www.kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/CATALOG/ENGLISH/neuhaus2b-e.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Norma Adams Wade, "Whistlers Stage Big Blowout," *Dallas Morning News* (January 3, 1977).

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Arnold Dibble, "Listeners Whistle a 'Classic' Tune," *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (January 4, 1977).

aired in 1973, broadcast by WFMT in Chicago. Neuhaus's *Public Supply* pieces demonstrated the thriving connections between local public stations and experimental composers discussed briefly above. At a time when many composers enthusiastically confirmed Cage's adage that any sound could be music, a similar approach to sound shared by public radio producers (and the one evinced by Siemering) made for dynamic collaboration. Public broadcasting's emphasis on listener participation allowed artists to perforate the boundary between composer/performer and audience in new ways, a theme that was also frequently explored in non-broadcast experimental art. Reminiscing about the circumstances that led to *Public Supply I*, Neuhaus wrote:

Looking back to 1966, it seems as though I began these broadcast pieces almost by accident. I was asked by a woman who was the music director at radio station WBAI in New York if she could interview me. At a certain moment while thinking about it I had this idea—instead of talking, why not try to make a work for the radio itself?<sup>62</sup>

Both *Public Supply* pieces were designed specifically for radio as an instrument, yet they differed from many radiophonic pieces because they did not feature recorded or documentary sound. Rather, Neuhaus was exploring the potential for “liveness” in radio in the broadcasts of all of these pieces. The composer explained the importance of listener participation, as well as the risks involved and his solutions to technical obstacles when designing *Public Supply I* at WBAI:

I realized I could open a large door into the radio studio with the telephone; if I installed telephone lines in the studio, anybody could sonically walk in from any telephone. ... I got the telephone company to install ten telephones in the studio by telling them they were for taking the responses for a fund-raising campaign. With a friend, I built this wonderful pre-answering-machine ten-line answering machine. Each phone sat on a small platform and had a solenoid-controlled lever which fit under its receiver. ... It was a bit strange but not chaos—ten telephones on the floor with their handsets popping up and down and voices coming out of a speaker in front of his microphone.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/CATALOG/ENGLISH/neuhaus2a-e.html>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

Notice that the composer mentioned sonic presence via voice: “anyone could sonically walk through the door.” This sonic presence was first mediated through a phone line, and then broadcast to local listeners via WBAI.

*Public Supply II* (designed for Chicago) was similar to *Public Supply I* in New York, although, as the composer explained, he began to move away from speech and toward more abstract physical utterances:

Here I started exploring the concept of giving people special instruments to play with their voice over the telephone. In this work I built a synthesis circuit for each caller. Rather simple: oscillators where the pitch was determined by the energy of each call. The signals were integrated over a long period of time, so that the result was a bank of slowly shifting pitches forming a cluster which was constantly reforming according to what people were doing. The sounds that they were making rode along on top of this.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, in both *Public Supply* pieces, Neuhaus’s focus was on radio and telephone as participatory and live media, where listeners supplied the primary musical material. Each project retained his focus on collective music-making through broadcasting.

The most notable difference between the early *Public Supply* pieces and *Radio Net* was the scope of the national stage provided by NPR. While similar projects dedicated to live ambient sounds had been mounted by local stations (such as Amacher’s *City Links*, and Sahl’s and Amirkhanian’s call-in ambient sound shows), *Radio Net* would reach a much broader audience due to its position on NPR. For this same reason, it would also draw from a larger pool of participants.

For *Radio Net*, there were five cities from which people could call: New York, Dallas, Atlanta, Minneapolis and Los Angeles. The piece was advertised in those cities’ major papers, with instructions on how to participate. In most cases, the event was billed as a musical novelty,

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/CATALOG/ENGLISH/neuhaus2a-e.html>



a humorous and playful way to have a contribution heard on the air. In the *National Observer*, an article subtitled, “Just whistle and he’ll put you on the air—live,” offered the idea as a chance to participate in “the world’s largest orchestra.”<sup>65</sup> This comparison was both notable and curious because the resulting piece bore no similarity to an orchestral sound. Instead, the comparison did the work of defining Neuhaus’s piece as *music* and emphasizing his status as composer/creator.

The announcement continued with its musical characterization of the event:

Your maestro will be Max Neuhaus, an electronics sorcerer who wants “musicians” like yourself in 150 cities to whistle into their telephones on Jan. 2. A nation of whistlers and Ma Bell’s phone system will be the featured players in *Radio Net*, a Neuhaus concert to be broadcast live over National Public Radio that day.

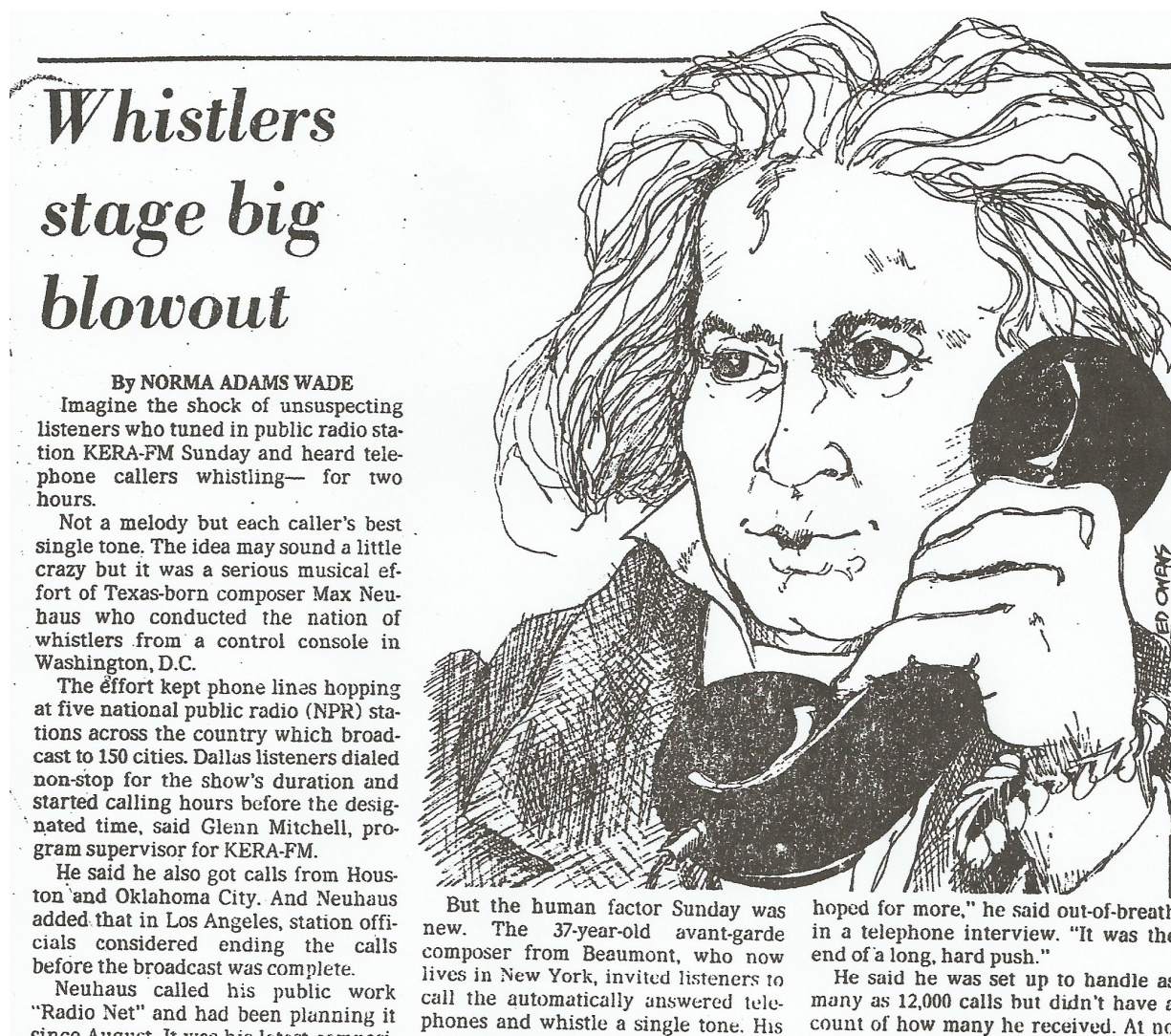
Humor and risk came into play further as the same announcement read: “It all sounds a little crazy, and more than a little bit fun.” Another announcement stressed that this opportunity required no musical training or skill: “even if you can’t sing a note or play an instrument you can perform in a large nation wide composition.”<sup>66</sup> This emphasis on the humorous and unconventional nature of the piece was reproduced in coverage after the event. The *Dallas Morning News* ran a tongue-in-cheek title (“Whistlers Stage Big Blowout”) accompanied by a cartoon depicting Beethoven on the telephone (see Figure 1.1). Such humor may have deflected and eased the radical nature of a two-hour program featuring modulated whistles, as well as squarely locating this event as musical through the figure of Beethoven.

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<sup>65</sup> Daniel Henninger, “Next, a Musical Tweet: Just Whistle and He’ll Put You on the Air—Live,” *National Observer* (December 26, 1976).

<sup>66</sup> “Listeners Invited to Join Nationwide Orchestra,” *Atlanta Daily World* (January 4, 1977): 5. See also a mention of the upcoming program by Tom Johnson, “Creating the Context: Max Neuhaus” (December 6, 1976), in *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972–1982: A Collection of Articles Originally Published in The Village Voice* (The Netherlands: Colophon, 1989) 146–147.

Figure 1.1: Cartoon by Ed Owens accompanying a review of Neuhaus's *Radio Net*<sup>67</sup>



## Whistlers stage big blowout

By NORMA ADAMS WADE

Imagine the shock of unsuspecting listeners who tuned in public radio station KERA-FM Sunday and heard telephone callers whistling—for two hours.

Not a melody but each caller's best single tone. The idea may sound a little crazy but it was a serious musical effort of Texas-born composer Max Neuhaus who conducted the nation of whistlers from a control console in Washington, D.C.

The effort kept phone lines hopping at five national public radio (NPR) stations across the country which broadcast to 150 cities. Dallas listeners dialed non-stop for the show's duration and started calling hours before the designated time, said Glenn Mitchell, program supervisor for KERA-FM.

He said he also got calls from Houston and Oklahoma City. And Neuhaus added that in Los Angeles, station officials considered ending the calls before the broadcast was complete.

Neuhaus called his public work "Radio Net" and had been planning it since August. It was his latest attempt

But the human factor Sunday was new. The 37-year-old avant-garde composer from Beaumont, who now lives in New York, invited listeners to call the automatically answered telephones and whistle a single tone. His

hoped for more," he said out-of-breath in a telephone interview. "It was the end of a long, hard push."

He said he was set up to handle as many as 12,000 calls but didn't have a count of how many he received. At no

In addition to emphasizing collectivity and communication in his work, Neuhaus later described his intention to move beyond language in his radio pieces:

Although I was not able to articulate it in 1966, now, after having worked with this idea for a long time and talked about it and thought about it, it seems that what these works are really about is proposing to reinstate a kind of music which we have forgotten about and which is perhaps the original impulse for music in man: not making a musical

<sup>67</sup> Norma Adams Wade, "Whistlers Stage Big Blowout," *The Dallas Morning News* (January 3 1977). National Public Broadcasting Archives, UMD, Archives of NPR, Unprocessed Materials (hereafter NPBA NPR, Unprocessed), Box 8. Reprinted with permission of *The Dallas Morning News*.

product to be listened to, but forming a dialogue, a dialogue without language, a sound dialogue.

These pieces then are about building the circumstances where ordinary people can begin this nonverbal dialogue. We all have highly developed skills in hearing and vocalization—these innate skills demonstrated by our ability with language. The telephone and radio themselves provide a good foundation as they focus the mind on sound and their visual anonymity helps overcome selfconsciousness. The real problem then is finding ways to escape from our present conceptions of what music is.<sup>68</sup>

*Radio Net* was a large scale audience participation piece that challenged preconceptions about music *and* radio. Rathe was aware of this dual function for *Radio Net*, and referred to Siemering's "Purposes" when explaining *Radio Net*'s status as experimental radio. In his review of the piece in the *New York Times*, John Rockwell identified Rathe as an "NPR official," and he was quoted asserting the institution's commitment to radio art and sound. Rathe's comment was drawn from the "Purposes," and shows their resonance years later:

As far as officials of NPR are concerned, *Radio Net* has come along at precisely the right time. Steve Rathe, the producer of today's program, is a former staff member of WBAI, the New York City radio station noted for its experimental programming. He puts it this way: "Our mandate is not only to make programs but to explore new possibilities for radio."<sup>69</sup>

Surely *Radio Net* did this. In fact, in its re-imagining of the medium of radio's purpose as participatory, the piece harkened back to critiques of radio from the medium's very early days, especially from left-leaning media theorists who argued about the "undemocratic and undialectical nature of radio."<sup>70</sup> But it also reflected Siemering's more recent and contemporary concern that radio should be a populist medium; an ideal written into NPR's "Purposes."

Neuhaus' piece turned public radio stations into participatory amplification machines linked

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/CATALOG/ENGLISH/neuhaus2a-e.html>

<sup>69</sup> John Rockwell, "Whistle While You Tune In To Avant-Garde Radio," *New York Times* (January 2, 1977).

<sup>70</sup> Bruce Barber, "Radio: Audio Art's Frightful Parent," in *Sound By Artists*, ed. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (Toronto: Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990), 109.

through their NPR membership. In *Radio Net*, NPR became an instrument made of telephone lines and played by its listeners.

*Radio Net* was also important because it showed the flexibility NPR offered in its days as a smaller institution, and because it served as a model for the potential marriage between radio and musical experimentalism that *RadioVisions*'s staff hoped to achieve several years later.

Remembering the event of *Radio Net* with some amusement and shock in 2009, Rathe explained that, for *Radio Net*:

They [NPR] let us take over—these were different days—they cancelled Sunday “All Things Considered” because only one thing could be on the wired network at a time, so that we might do a new music piece created for the NPR network, and allow listeners to participate.<sup>71</sup>

This willingness to experiment stemmed, in part, from the institution's early interest in sonic experimentation, written into NPR's founding documents, and preserved through the persistence and similar ideals of employees like Rathe. Unlike radiophonic pieces that relied on documentary sound (the main overlap of the pieces addressed in the next chapters), *Radio Net* presented live performance art created by listeners. NPR allowed the medium of radio to function as a musical instrument as its phone lines resonated with the whistling of its listeners.

## Conclusion

Before I examine the 1981 broadcast of *RadioVisions* in the next two chapters, it is important to note that NPR's “Purposes” were, at this point, almost ten years old, and that their author was no longer employed by NPR. In fact, Jack Mitchell includes an anecdote at the beginning of his history of NPR that reveals both the ideological importance yet non-essential nature of the “Purposes:” when trying to locate a copy of Siemering's document in the late 1990s

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Rathe, May 26, 2009, New York. The current “Weekend Edition Sunday” did not begin until 1987.

to publish in *Current* (the newsletter of public radio and television), NPR was unable to do so.<sup>72</sup> Mitchell argues that this rather unbelievable circumstance (for Mitchell, akin to a “preacher without a Bible”) was irrelevant to assessing the importance of the “Purposes,” and that the document’s contents (though idealistic) had been thoroughly absorbed into the culture of the institution.<sup>73</sup> Histories of NPR have heavily emphasized the role of the “Purposes” in the institution’s founding, as well as Siemering’s authorship and guiding presence. The document has even been used to assess NPR’s successes and failures based on the institution’s adherence to or departure from the ideals it expounded.<sup>74</sup> Yet in the reams of pages devoted to Siemering’s vision and NPR’s adopted “Purposes,” the potential for musical experiment latent in the document has been all but neglected. The institution’s attention to radiophonic experimentation and the creative use of sound, laid out so clearly and influentially in the “Purposes,” allowed the innovative producer Rathe and composer Neuhaus to successfully merge “experimental music” with “experimental radio” in *Radio Net*.

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<sup>72</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, ix. The version of NPR’s “Purposes” archived online for *Current* was eventually scanned from a personal copy in his possession (<http://www.current.org/pbpb/documents/NRpurposes.html>).

<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, ix–x.

<sup>74</sup> For example, McCauley finds it useful to view NPR’s primary tension as “a battle between people whose main objective is to ensure NPR’s political and economic *survival* and those who seek to maintain the normative sense of *mission* that Bill Siemering put forth in 1970.” Emphasis in original. His analysis compares realities at NPR to the ideals of the “Purposes.” McCauley, *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, 13.

## Chapter 2

### IMAGINING LISTENERS THROUGH AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC: NPR's *RADIOVISIONS*

In the fall of 1981, NPR broadcast *RadioVisions*, a series of weekly shows covering new music. *RadioVisions* was a relatively large scale non-news production for NPR in 1981, with a total budget of almost \$78,000, including over \$46,000 in combined grant money from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the New York State Council on the Arts, the Mellon Foundation, and WXXI-FM in Rochester, NY.<sup>1</sup> The series was the result of an extensive collaboration with NPR member stations, musicians, and independent producers. The producers' ambitious goals for *RadioVisions* included overcoming "the barriers between new music and the general listener,"<sup>2</sup> as well as "pushing back the walls of conventional radio presentation" to "open new spaces to experiment."<sup>3</sup> *RadioVisions* was not only meant to include radio documentary *about* new music; the program was intended to include radio documentary that could *itself* be heard as new music.

The resulting parade of music was led on air by Gunther Schuller, who acted as host for each of the hour-long programs. Schuller's narration was designed to help listeners draw connections between broadcasts and to make sense of the potentially unfamiliar sounds in each segment. For further guidance, the programs also incorporated recorded interviews with

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<sup>1</sup> *RadioVisions* received NEA grant no. 02-3442-301 for \$28,000; \$7,500 from the New York State Council on the Arts; and \$10,513 from the Mellon Foundation and WXXI-FM in Rochester, New York. See "Final Revised Budgets," University of Maryland Public Broadcasting Archives, Archives of NPR, Unprocessed Materials (hereafter "UMD NPR Unprocessed"), Box 123.

<sup>2</sup> "Proposal to NEA—*RadioVisions*," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 8, p. 2 Various drafts of the proposal exist in the archival record; I am referring to the finished version sent to the NEA unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

composers, performers, and music scholars, and occasionally even family members and colleagues of the featured musicians. Several broadcasts included detailed narration by a second host (usually the producer of that individual segment). The interviews and commentary spackling the segments together ensured that sounds of *RadioVisions* were heavily curated. Each episode came packaged with a ready-made context in which the listener could place the music. For the most part, the music was characterized as innovative, unconventional, non-academic, and distinctly American yet influenced by non-Western cultures; a type of music that many historians and journalists have labeled “experimental.”<sup>4</sup>

The structure and culture of NPR helped shape *RadioVisions* into a musical product that was crafted to attract coveted new listeners. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, NPR’s cultural programming was often justified by the (financial) response it might elicit from listeners, as well as its potential to draw new listeners to member stations. Frank Mankiewicz (NPR’s president in from 1977 to 1983) celebrated NPR’s substantially expanded audience in his introduction to the 1981 Annual Report, crediting programming for the boom:

Two million new listeners discovered National Public Radio between spring 1980 and spring 1981. ... This surge in listenership is even more significant because it did not result from increase in signal capacity, technological innovation, or entry into new markets—factors which usually precede and effect radio audience growth. Our astonishing audience gain resulted from the ability of NPR and member stations to meet the needs of the American public by providing a wealth of quality programming unavailable elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Catherine Cameron, *Dialectics in the Arts: The Rise of Experimentalism in American Music* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996); Joaquim Benitez, “Avant-Garde or Experimental? Classifying Contemporary Music,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 9/1 (1978): 53–77; David Nicholls, “Avant-Garde and Experimental Music,” in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 517–534; and Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 1997), and *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Frank Mankiewicz, “President’s Letter” (National Public Radio, *Annual Report*, 1981), 2.

Accordingly, NPR employed focus groups and extensive audience research to quantify and evaluate listener responses to their programming. Yet, in the drive for program-driven expansion, NPR's "listeners"—and especially the as-of-yet unknown "new listeners"—were also projected through the programming designed for them. NPR's potential audience haunted the structure of the institution, giving purpose to its programming, validating funding choices, and guiding its growth.

This chapter examines the "American experimentalism" of *RadioVisions* within the context of NPR and its imagined listeners. Using archival materials and interviews, I concentrate first on recounting *RadioVisions*'s production history, with special emphasis on glimpsing the ghostly listeners guiding the project and tracing the ways in which the series came to focus on American experimentalism. I then turn to the way that *RadioVisions* overtly projected "new listeners" on air, focusing on the opening segment titled "The Challenge." I conclude that *RadioVisions*'s version of musical experimentalism was related to its identity as an NPR product. *RadioVisions*'s experimentalism allowed NPR to present a distinctly American, diverse, and innovative music, while making space for listeners who would value such programming.

### **Production History and Composition**

*RadioVisions*'s executive producer, Rathe, began planning a radio series featuring new music in 1979. Speaking thirty years later, Rathe remembered the creative freedom he felt at NPR at the time. He said, "If you had a good and interesting idea, the answer, more often than not, was, 'why not?'"<sup>6</sup> The NPR of 1979 was smaller and less established than today's NPR, although it was growing quickly. This was the year that the still-popular *Morning Edition* made

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Steve Rathe, May 26, 2009, New York City.



its debut. The institution was gaining momentum under the leadership and charisma of its well-connected president Mankiewicz, and it was only beginning to rack up the debilitating debt that threatened to destroy it in 1984.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1970s, Rathe's work at NPR consisted largely of producing jazz and folk music programs. Recalling his inspiration for the series, Rathe shared that he was "fascinated by the connection that Ruth Crawford Seeger made between folk music and contemporary music, and especially Cowell, and so I wanted to try to find a way to do that."<sup>8</sup> In addition to his work with Neuhaus on *Radio Net* in 1977, he had already commissioned a radio piece on Henry Cowell, and wanted to extend the success of this piece into a series.

The next step toward getting *RadioVisions* on air was drafting a proposal that would attract funding to the project. Production would require a significant amount of money—"enough to get in trouble with"—as Rathe put it.<sup>9</sup> The grant proposal to the NEA began by defining the goals of the show in relation to its intended audience:

[*RadioVisions*] is a series of 14 hour-long programs designed to open up the appeal of new music and audio art for a broad general audience. It will bring together some of the foremost contemporary composers and performers as well as outstanding radio producers to present new music in a setting that will delight the understanding as well as the ear, and persuade general listeners to stay tuned.<sup>10</sup>

This "broad" and "general" audience would need no prior knowledge of new music. Ideally, these inexperienced listeners would enjoy the new sounds of *RadioVisions*, appreciate being

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<sup>7</sup> See Irvin Molotsky, "What Went Wrong at National Public Radio?" *New York Times* (June 12, 1983); Jack W. Mitchell, *Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 93–117; and Michael P. McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs of National Public Radio* (New York: Columbia University Press), 37–77.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Rathe.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> "Proposal to NEA—*RadioVisions*," 1.

educated through listening, and therefore “stay tuned” to their local public radio station.

*RadioVisions*’s listeners were conjured up in the first paragraph of the proposal, and would quietly inhabit the entire production process.

The proposal also played up the means of distribution to the listeners in that broad, general audience. Before 1979, NPR sent its programming to member stations over telephone lines (the very apparatus utilized so creatively by Neuhaus in *Radio Net*). But their new satellite system (WESTAR) would greatly improve the quality of transmission, and the *RadioVisions* proposal capitalized on this new equipment:

*RadioVisions* would represent a celebration of the high fidelity stereo sound the satellite will make possible. The subtleties of new music and audio art will receive the most advanced state-of-the-art radio transmission when *RadioVisions* goes on the air. *RadioVisions* could tap an unprecedented audience for new music, not only because of the crafted framing of the music in an appealing manner, but because a delivery system technically capable of high fidelity transmission and reception will be in place for the first time.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the *RadioVisions* staff wisely introduced the series as a project that fit NPR. They showcased the show’s wide-range of timbres and dynamics (“its subtleties”), its edifying commentary that would make it accessible to listeners (“framing of the music in an appealing manner”), and its suitability for NPR’s distribution system. By presenting the show as a “celebration” of the new satellite’s sound, they also implied that *RadioVisions* had potential as a publicity piece for NPR.<sup>12</sup>

The connection between NPR’s distribution system and its potential for musical experiment had a precedent in Neuhaus’s *Radio Net*, discussed in chapter 1. Rathe included a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, the paragraph on the new satellite began with the explanation that “NPR plans to pilot two *RadioVisions* programs to coincide with its major public awareness campaign, scheduled for October or November, 1980. The broadcast of the full *RadioVisions* series should begin January, 1981.” Since the program was not ready for broadcast until fall of 1981, it is unlikely that the program was used this way (although the Cowell program would have been available, at least). “Proposal to NEA—*RadioVisions*,” 14.

summary of the Neuhaus event in *RadioVisions*'s grant proposal in a section labeled "history," and also attached newspaper articles on the success of the event to the grant proposal as supporting materials.<sup>13</sup> *RadioVisions*—while not linked to NPR's distribution system so literally as *Radio Net* had been—was related to this earlier piece through its grant proposal and its conception as a *radio* project.

Rathe assembled an advisory panel comprised of John Duffy, Richard Felciano, Ulysses Kay, Ilhan Mimaroglou, David Stock, and Joan Tower, later adding Steve Reich to bring the membership to seven.<sup>14</sup> *RadioVisions*'s production team then sent a call to radio producers soliciting submissions on any topic in new music. Together, the panel and the *RadioVisions* staff (which consisted of Rathe, Doug Levy of WXXI-FM, and Greg Shifrin of ZBS Media), would judge and select submissions. The accepted projects would then be further reviewed and polished. Although the call was open, the advisory panel reserved the right to "develop" the programs to make them part of a coherent series. In addition, advisory panel members were encouraged to brainstorm and call for submissions covering topics that they felt were important.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Attachments to the *RadioVisions* grant proposal included Arnold Dibble, "Listeners Whistle a 'Classic' Tune," *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (January 4, 1977); Norma Adams Wade, "Whistlers Stage Big Blowout," *The Dallas Morning News* (January 3, 1977); Daniel Henninger, "Next, a Musical Tweet: Just Whistle and He'll Put You on the Air—Live," *National Observer* (December 26, 1976); and John Rockwell, "Whistle While You Tune In to Avant-Garde Radio," *The New York Times* (January 2, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> Reich's name was not included in the early materials, and he was not present at the first advisory panel meeting. His name was first included in a letter of Nov. 24, 1980 from Rathe to the *RadioVisions* staff and music advisory panel. UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123..

<sup>15</sup> Rathe wrote to the advisory panel, "we will then work with the ideas you have suggested and attempt to interest various producers in submitting proposals along those lines. (I think we must still work through and maintain the framework of the proposal-production process which we told our underwriters we would follow.) I have every expectation that we will be able to meet our objectives in musical quality as well as in the creativity of radio production." Rathe, "Letter to *RadioVisions* Music Advisory Panel," November 24, 1980, UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

The advisory panel also made the case for supporting new American music: “Regarding the emphasis on the work of American composers, we strongly felt that the series should be limited to composers in this country who, unlike their brethren in Europe, have enjoyed little institutional support.”<sup>16</sup> The ZBS Foundation’s early goals regarding the show were similar, as they cited the lack of institutional support for composers in America: “Many artists working in these fields have never had national exposure due not to their lack of appeal to large audiences but to the extremely restrictive and confined formats of radio stations and record companies in America.”<sup>17</sup> This perception was widespread. David Stock (conductor of the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble at the time) told Rathe that he perceived:

the potential and the need for NPR’s involvement in contemporary music. Every European country has its state-run radio to encourage and promulgate its own music. We have no equivalent here—but NPR, as the closest parallel, can be of great service to audiences, composers, performers, and the whole development of our American musical culture.<sup>18</sup>

This desire for increased institutional support for U.S. composers and enthusiasm for NPR’s production of *RadioVisions* translated to a nationalist characterization of the new music in the finished series.

The language of the request for proposals encouraged submissions presenting experimental music by stating that *RadioVisions* was “concerned with that body of contemporary work dealing in the creative use of sound.”<sup>19</sup> Although the request *did* mention traditional concert music as a suitable topic, the request also listed the following notable trends in new

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<sup>16</sup> “Summary of First *RadioVisions* Advisory Panel Meeting,” UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> “*RadioVisions*,” September 17, 1979, UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 8.

<sup>18</sup> David Stock, “Letter to Steve Rathe,” November 1, 1979, UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 8, pp. 1–2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> “Summary of First *RadioVisions* Advisory Panel Meeting,” p. 2.

music as possible topics: the “unconventional” use of instruments, “composer-invented instruments,” “instruments from other cultures,” “common household gadgets,” “recordings of concrete sounds,” music that is “‘scored’ using graphs, illustrations, or verbal instructions which convey the composer’s concept,” and “music without notation,” or “composition in real time.”<sup>20</sup> These topics, which were indeed central to many of the *RadioVisions* segments, are also elements that have informed historical constructions of American “experimentalism.” For example, the “unconventional use of instruments” and “composer-invented instruments” are familiar early twentieth-century innovations lauded in the work of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, Harry Partch, and Conlon Nancarrow (to name a few). The mention of cultural borrowing—evident in the suggested topic of “instruments from other cultures”—is a familiar and problematic aspect of experimentalism, where musical ideas from non-Western cultures have sometimes been absorbed into a supposedly uniquely American sound.<sup>21</sup> By listing “recordings of concrete sounds” and encouraging the use of “common household gadgets,” the call for proposals invoked a Cagian focus on ambient sound. And compositional considerations such as the use of graphic scores, improvisation, and the composer’s written instructions were core components of form-based definitions of experimental music.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Request for Proposals,” UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> See John Corbett, “Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others,” in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 163–186; Martin Scherzinger, “‘Art’ Music in a Cross-Cultural Context: The Case of Africa,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 584–613; and Barry Shank, “Productive Orientalisms: Imagining Noise and Silence Across the Pacific, 1957–1967,” in *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 45–61.

<sup>22</sup> These formal/compositional elements define experimentalism (as opposed to a European avant-garde) for Nyman in *Experimental Music*. He argues that “the distinctions between the experimental and the avant-garde ultimately depend on purely musical considerations,” adding diplomatically that “it would be foolish to try and separate sound from the aesthetic, conceptual, philosophical, and ethical considerations that the music enshrines” (2). Specific elements in Nyman’s book that overlapped with *RadioVisions*’s request for proposals include a “radical shift in the

Not only did the notion of experimentalism pervade the proposal's descriptions of potential musical topics, but it also infused its ideals regarding radio art/audio documentary. At the first advisory panel meeting, the participants had recognized the sonic overlap between some experimental music and radio art, "calling upon producers to come up with proposals which treat the realm of new music with creativity, imagination, a knowledge of radio techniques, and understanding of radio audiences, and an appreciation of the richness of available material."<sup>23</sup> They settled on the phrase "audio art" as a way to include as many sonic options as possible, wanting to include pieces built out of speech and real-world sounds; sonic building blocks which were—not coincidentally—core components of radio documentary. Significantly, the advisory panel "recognized that in a sense the [radio] producer is like a composer."<sup>24</sup> This conception favored musical projects that were more like radio art than concert music. The advisory panel planned to distribute the request for proposals to "all NPR member stations, all NFCB member stations, all Pacifica stations, known independent producers (from lists provided by Audio Independents, New Music America attendees, and other sources), some specific commercial stations, some commercial record producers," and "subscribers to *The Journal of Exploratory Radio*."<sup>25</sup> This list showed their commitment to soliciting experimental proposals. Remembering the project, Rathe again emphasized that "the idea really was innovation on the structural and programmatic level."<sup>26</sup>

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methods and functions of notation" (3) and composers "outlining a *situation* in which sounds may occur, a *process* of generating action" (4, italics in original).

<sup>23</sup> "Summary of First *RadioVisions* Advisory Panel Meeting," p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Rathe.

After sifting through what Rathe remembered as approximately 100 proposals, the panel chose thirteen for inclusion in *RadioVisions*.<sup>27</sup> Almost all of the winning producers were regulars in new music circles. For example, Charles Amirkhanian, who produced two segments, is a composer in his own right, and had already worked extensively with new music on air for KPFA in Berkeley. There was also a contingency of producers and composers who were active in downtown New York, including Peter Gordon, Tom Johnson, Roma Baran, Steve Cellum, Ev Grimes, Laurie Anderson, and John Giorno. Thus, producers who were already active in new music scenes submitted proposals on music they were passionate about, and most of it could be classified as experimental.

In a letter to the staff and advisory panel, Rathe began the process of choosing a host, and outlined a limited role: “Try to keep in mind that our host voice will appear only at the end of the show, for about two minutes, with an explanation/description of the next show; perhaps some notion of how what we will hear relates to what we have just heard.”<sup>28</sup> The advisory panel had brainstormed about hosts at their first meeting several months prior on June 18, 1980. According to the summary, there were concerns about what having a host would mean for the series:

In defining the host’s role we need to keep in mind the best use of the medium.... On the subject of having a host at all, it was recognized from a marketing point of view as desirable to have one, although some producers may find it undesirable to use one....it is a conventional radio production technique: do we want to use such a traditional device in a series that we hope will be anything but traditional and conventional? One obvious problem with using the host would be the uncomfortable juxtaposition of the host voice, and, say, a text-sound piece. Admittedly it is risky not to use a host, although a series that is successful *sans* host could be very exciting.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Rathe, “Letter to the *RadioVisions* Staff and Music Advisory Panel,” November 24, 1980, UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> “Summary of First *RadioVisions* Advisory Panel Meeting,” p. 9.

The discussion revealed deliberations on the medium of radio as more than simply a vehicle for distribution, and the panel related the role of a host to the norms of radio broadcasting. The special mention of text-sound composition showed an early commitment to including experimental elements. The use of a host was also related to the series' intended wider appeal to its audience (marketing, identification). The panel concluded that the host should provide "a *presence* which will be a reassuring mediator for the audience."<sup>30</sup>

Schuller agreed to host and write his own commentary for the show.<sup>31</sup> Rathe, in a letter to Schuller, hoped that his comments would "be spoken in a purposeful but casual way, as they might if each of our listeners was lucky enough to have Gunther Schuller there in the car or living room or kitchen during the broadcast."<sup>32</sup> Schuller's very presence, as well as his mode of performance, were planned with the series' "listeners" in mind. His reputable position in the classical musical world meant that he would likely be known by classical music lovers, and could serve as an authoritative guide. Schuller also offered an interesting counterpoint to the American experimentalism of the show through his commentary, as his thoughts on twentieth-century music clearly differed from those of Rathe's and several of the individual producers.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of Schuller's alternative take on contemporary music, the sum of his commentary, the segments' subjects, and the various narration within segments offered a distinctly American version of experimentalism. Table 2.1 lists each of the segments in

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Italics in original.

<sup>31</sup> For information on the choice of Schuller and his role in the show, see chapter 3.

<sup>32</sup> Rathe, "Letter to Gunther Schuller," March 9, 1981, UMD NPR, Unprocessed, Box 123.

<sup>33</sup> For example, in his commentary on "Music in Reaction: The New Consonance," Schuller argued forcefully (and directly against the enthusiasm of the composers included) that the new consonance was problematic, especially because it ignored the "historical imperative" of serialism. I will return to Schuller's historiographic voice and his objection to the "new consonance" later in this chapter.



*RadioVisions*, the producer(s) of each segment, and their descriptions (quoted from NPR publicity material).

**Table 2.1: *RadioVisions* Segments, Descriptions, and Producers, Publicity Poster, 1981<sup>34</sup>**

<b>Segment Title</b>	<b>Description and Producer(s)</b>
The Challenge: An Introduction	Executive producer Steve Rathe introduces the series with a look at public radio and its traditional role in offering a platform for American artists. The program examines the challenge of presenting the experimental, the unusual, and the avant-garde, all a central part of the series.
Henry Cowell: the Gentle Pioneer	This CPB Award-winning documentary, which provided the inspiration for the series, focuses on the life and work of the late Henry Cowell, one of America's most innovative composers. The program evokes Cowell's unique aural world and incorporates the comments of many of his students and colleagues. (Produced by Steve Cellum and Ev Grimes)
The Elder Statesmen: Ernst Bacon, Otto Luening, Leo Ornstein, Dane Rudhyar, Nicholas Slonimsky, Virgil Thomson	Audio portraits of six octogenarian composers are presented, all of whom began their careers at a time when no recognizable American "classical" music was being written. (Produced by Charles Amirkhanian)
Keyboard Innovations	This program traces the radical changes in compositional approach, acoustics, and construction of the familiar keyboard instrument—the piano. Featured are the works of Conlon Nancarrow, author of the pioneering "Studies for Player Piano," and composers Lou Harrison, John Cage, and David Rosenboom. (Produced by Eva Soltes)
Shoptalk	An extraordinary composition for radio is presented by composer/arranger/instrumentalist Peter Gordon. This audio collage of conversations among several New York composers is interwoven with examples of their music. (Produced by Peter Gordon)
Details at Eleven: John Giorno and Laurie Anderson	The manipulation of sound, texture, and rhythm which we call music can often include the spoken word, as do the works of poet John Giorno, and violinist/composer Laurie Anderson. Audio vignettes from the lives of these two artists are juxtaposed with their works. (Produced by Roma Baron and ZBS Media)
The Oldest Instrument	Joan La Barbara, singer/composer/musicologist, leads listeners through the entire range of new ways the voice, the world's oldest instrument, is being used by modern composers. Featured is the world premiere of a work by George Costinenco commissioned especially for the program. (Produced by Linda Blythe, WQED-FM/Pittsburgh)
The Composer as Conductor	The interaction between composing and conducting is revealed in portraits of the creative lives of four prominent American musicians—Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss, and Gunther Schuller. The program includes commentary by four of their distinguished colleagues, Leonard Slatkin, Tania León, Karel Husa, and H. Wiley Hitchcock. (Produced by Steve Cellum and Ev Grimes)
Music in Reaction: The New Consonance	This program illuminates the move from dissonance to consonance by many new music composers over the last two decades. Presented are the words and comments of some of those musicians, including Steve Reich, Harold Budd, and Lou Harrison. (Produced by Charles Amirkhanian)
Composition in Real Time	The process and product of improvisational music is examined, including jazz, "creative music," and other related forms. The program features artists Ornette Coleman, Anthony Braxton, Pauline Oliveros, Roscoe Mitchell, and Leo Smith. (Produced by Ray Gallon)

<sup>34</sup> UMD NPR, Unprocessed.

Notes from the Steel City	Daniel Lentz, William Thomas McKinley, and David Stock are all Pittsburgh-based composers who share a generation, neo-classical backgrounds, and several mentors. Through music and interviews, this program focuses on their diverse works, in the “mainstream” of contemporary classical composition. (Produces by Mark Yacavonne, WQED-FM/Pittsburgh)
Symmetries	The universal search for order and balance in everyday life is the theme of Tom Johnson’s “Symmetries,” 24 short works for eight violas. The pieces are intermixed with poetry, palindromes, and insights from individuals as diverse as a disco patron and a nuclear physicist. (Produced by Tom Johnson and Steve Cellum)
Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake by John Cage	The American premiere of Cage’s acclaimed polyphonic oratorio is presented. The work comprises more than 5,000 sounds evoked in James Joyce’s masterpiece <i>Finnegans Wake</i> . The sounds were taped on location throughout the work, layered into more than 60 tracks, and mixed with a text adapted from words in the book, written and spoken by Cage himself. John Cage is recognized worldwide as a leader and guiding spirit of contemporary music. (Radio setting produced by Ev Grimes; “Roaratorio” realized by John Cage and John Fullenman for Westdeutscher Rundfunk.)
High Tech Etude	This radio collage from Cincinnati features its poets, artists, writers, musicians, composers, and the sounds of their city. (Produced by Douglas Smith)
Where Do We Go From Here?	Examples of the breadth of 20 <sup>th</sup> century American music accompany the reflections of composer/conductor and series host Gunther Schuller. He appraises the state of contemporary music, its precedents, and the challenge of being a composer as we approach the end of the century.

*RadioVisions* presented a now-familiar group of experimentalists, beginning with early twentieth-century “pioneers” and establishing historical precedent for the music that would follow. The early programs spotlighted “founding fathers” of American music, including Henry Cowell, Ernst Bacon, Otto Luening, Leo Ornstein, Dane Rudhyar, Nicholas Slonimsky, Virgil Thomson, Conlon Nancarrow, Lou Harrison, and Harry Partch. The series characterized all of these composers as “pioneers,” “mavericks,” and “innovators” who crafted (or championed, in the case of Slonimsky) an American music that broke away from European influence.<sup>35</sup>

The Cowell program was not composed for *RadioVisions*—it was an older piece commissioned by Rathe. Created by Grimes and Cellum for NPR in 1978, it won the Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s award for Best Cultural Documentary that year. It was also the program that most directly inspired the *RadioVisions* series. Rathe distributed it to the

<sup>35</sup> Though Rathe was familiar with Ruth Crawford Seeger’s music, neither she nor any of her female colleagues were included in this segment, resulting in a severe gender imbalance.

advisory panel and explained: “It is included as an example of the kind of creative approach to new music programming I hope to see throughout *RadioVisions*. This program also served as a demo for both the NEA and NYSCA of what we want to inspire with *RadioVisions*.”<sup>36</sup> The piece artfully combined Cowell’s compositions with interviews (including several with his wife Sydney Cowell and music historians Vivian Perlis and H. Wiley Hitchcock), ambient sounds, and field recordings of music that had formed part of Cowell’s musical soundscape. The composer’s own voice could be heard in the program, courtesy of recordings made by Rita Mead and Hitchcock in 1962. The commentary in “The Gentle Pioneer” also set up some of the standard tropes of American experimentalism: listeners learned that Cowell was a West Coast composer, free from European influence, and that he had composed distinctly American music that was informed by non-Western musical styles. This characterization of Cowell was amplified after the show was incorporated into *RadioVisions*, when Schuller added that “Cowell suffered quite a bit for his audacious experiments. He was one of the first of our twentieth-century loners, an American original.”<sup>37</sup> Thus Cowell’s distance from Europe allowed him to be innovative and experimental in his compositions, which in turn contributed to his status as an “American original.”

The same historical narrative continued in the second segment, titled “The Elder Statesmen.” Schuller introduced the program with the following:

When these composers were beginning to write, America’s reliance on Germany and France for musical inspiration was at its height, to the extent that composing in America almost exclusively represented simple emulation of the European masters. Today, American composers are trendsetters more than followers. ... These musicians, laboring in the American cultural vacuum of the twenties, thirties, and forties worked from a grass roots level of personal alliances and mutual support. Their dedication, their vision, and

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<sup>36</sup> Steve Rathe, “Letter to the *RadioVisions* Staff and Music Advisory Panel,” November 24, 1980.

<sup>37</sup> Transcribed from “The Gentle Pioneer.”

their creative talent produced for younger generations the first role models of an independent American composer.<sup>38</sup>

When speaking about the early twentieth century, Schuller referred to people who were “composing in America.” But once they became trendsetters, they earned the title of “American composers.” And later, he mentioned the role model of an “independent American composer.” In this introduction, the composer’s nationality (at least evidenced through music) was related to eschewing emulation and embracing originality. Schuller’s description of the “twenties, thirties, and forties” as an “American cultural vacuum” is stunningly curious. It is possible that Schuller was simply emphasizing the lack of precedent for “American” concert music. Certainly, Schuller’s academic work on jazz demonstrates his commitment to (and knowledge of) the wealth of popular music produced in these decades.<sup>39</sup> But invoking a “cultural vacuum” emphasized his opinion that (American) concert music performed at this time was not yet a fully fledged American music. Thus composers utilizing a more traditional musical language become part of the European foil against which listeners could hear “authentic” (read: experimental) American music.<sup>40</sup>

After the first two programs, the series proceeded by topic rather than chronologically. In the remaining segments, the commentary focused more on the topic at hand than on historical narrative; yet composers, producers, and narrators continued to construct national identity and “experimentalism” through their commentary. For example, in “Keyboard Innovations,” producer/narrator Eva Soltes introduced Lou Harrison as “part of a movement to break with

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<sup>38</sup> Transcribed from “The Elder Statesmen.”

<sup>39</sup> At this point, Schuller had published his first book on jazz. See Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1968, new printing 1986).

<sup>40</sup> For more on American music in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, see, for example, Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001). The argument that “American music” began in the twentieth century serves to disqualify other music from claiming this mantle.

European music.” During the program, she asked Harrison whether he considered “art and politics at all in the same arena.” Harrison’s answer was fascinating, as he allowed for a connection to politics while paradoxically denying any overt connection. He also commented that “the musical establishment” was not helpful, so he and Cage “went around it”:

My feeling about it is, politics is politics, we don’t have to do anything about it, but it has something to do about us. It is always affecting us no matter what we do. What is more pertinent to me is the sociological impetus and combinations and congruences. For example, the invention of the prepared piano as a large orchestra run by one man or the fact that when John Cage and I were writing percussion music you cannot find a snare drum roll nor any timpani; in short no professional instruments. It was a bypass of the establishment. If that’s political action, well, OK. All it was is that we were kids on the make and the establishment didn’t seem to be helpful so we went around it. And to a great degree, I still do.<sup>41</sup>

Here (as in many other instances in the first three segments of *RadioVisions*), the composer’s language helped contribute to an oppositional and anti-establishment characterization of the new music presented.

Following “Keyboard Innovations,” a trio of shows—“Shoptalk,” “Details at Eleven,” and “The Oldest Instrument”—centered on the voice in new music, especially text-sound compositions, electronically modified voices in music, and the use of extended and non-Western vocal techniques. *RadioVisions*’s third segment on the voice—“The Oldest Instrument”—included significant historical guidance from producer/composer Joan La Barbara. La Barbara provided commentary on the history of speech as music, completely bypassing European history and linking American music to primal origins through the human voice (discussed further in chapter 3). Schuller extended her narrative by introducing the episode with the following pitch:

Now in our next program on *RadioVisions* we will turn our attention to the voice itself, that oldest of instruments. From the first grunts and cries of the prehistoric human animal, to the vocal usages of today, the voice has been our most intimate instrument, constantly ready for instantaneous use. ... But in other cultures, distinctions between singing and

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<sup>41</sup> Transcribed from “Keyboard Innovations.”

speaking are not so clearly defined, and indeed sometimes completely overlap. In many African languages, for example, words and syllables are synonymous with music. ... Modern composers are aware of what's happened in other cultures, and also in the instrumental use of the voice in some kinds of jazz or popular music. Next week, singer and composer Joan La Barbara takes us on a guided tour of some latter day experiments with new vocal techniques, as well as using the oldest instrument in some new ways and new contexts.<sup>42</sup>

Notice the conspicuous circumvention of European music in Schuller's fast-paced journey from human origins to the present. This is uncharacteristic for Schuller, whose own segment of *RadioVisions* ("Where Do We Go from Here?") focused extensively on European history. His detour may have been influenced by La Barbara's narration (Schuller wrote his own commentary after being provided with the finished programs). It is laudable that sources such as "other" cultures, jazz, and popular music were at least named during "The Oldest Voice" (vaguely by Schuller, and identified specifically later in the program by La Barbara), rather than simply being absorbed into the "originality" of the music. It is interesting, however, that Schuller and La Barbara did not consider these cultural influences derivative in the same way as European influence.

*RadioVisions* continued with a segment called "Music in Reaction: The New Consonance," and focused on minimalism.<sup>43</sup> Here Schuller's commentary was at its most dissonant with the rest of the producers, as he did not hear this consonance as "new." At the end of "Music in Reaction," he objected, "perhaps as host of these programs I may be permitted an occasional intrusion of my own particular reactions." He argued that "simplification" as a musical answer is a "siren call" that could result in dangerous reduction. He felt strongly enough

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<sup>42</sup> Transcribed from "The Oldest Voice."

<sup>43</sup> This segment was made available for online streaming by producer Amirkhanian through RadioOm (<http://www.archive.org/details/RadioVisions>).

to air an additional complaint in his final segment of *RadioVisions*, “Where Do We Go From Here?”:

You can’t retreat, and it’s been tried many times and it has always failed. ... That kind of retreat, into some safe, known terrain, is, in my view, not the solution, because it does not add to what we have already achieved. We’ve had 300 years of tonality, and to me there’s nothing....about going back....My biggest argument would be that these composers make a choice amongst the hierarchy of elements that they use or don’t use, and by doing that they enable themselves to avoid answering some of the tough questions that in fact are facing them.<sup>44</sup>

Although the music of this segment was commonly included in the ranks of experimental music, Schuller clearly did not hear it as original or forward-thinking.

On the other hand, producer Charles Amirkhanian’s take on the music in “Music in Reaction: The New Consonance” highlighted the very reasons this music often fit comfortably in an “experimental” tradition, and contributed to *RadioVisions*’s overall characterization of new music.<sup>45</sup> Amirkhanian’s story as narrator began with Schoenberg, and he emphasized that the composer was part of the second Viennese school, and that his music was rooted in a European tradition. Amirkhanian then called on academia as the dominant and oppressive force in musical composition in America. Minimalism and the new consonance thus became a populist and authentic break from the hegemony of the academic and European avant-gardes. Themes of multiculturalism and populism emerged in Amirkhanian’s narrative, as well:

But all the while, on another front, the real wave of the future was gathering force. Composers Lamonte Young, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich, all living in San Francisco in the early 1960s, and all exposed to the great variety of world music from traditions other than those of Europe exclusively, hit upon a form of escape from the harsh, dissonant music of Schoenberg’s school. Their common interest in the classical music of India, the musics of the Orient, Indonesia, and Africa, and American jazz opened their minds to

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<sup>44</sup> Transcribed from “Where Do We Go From Here?”

<sup>45</sup> Nyman’s *Experimental Music* devoted a chapter to “Minimal Music, Determinacy and the New Tonality” (139–171), though unlike Amirkhanian who would describe a rupture from the second Viennese school, Nyman emphasized minimalism’s debt to serialism. “The origins of this minimal process music lie in serialism. ... La Monte Young was attracted by aspects of Webern’s music...[and] noticed Webern’s tendency to repeat pitches at the same octave positions through a section of a movement” (139).

certain musical possibilities, which hadn't been extensively explored yet in Western music.<sup>46</sup>

Again, non-Western music inspired composers to make *new* music: "the real wave of the future." The music featured in "Music In Reaction," perhaps not surprisingly given its popular appeal, was included in the promotional audio materials for *RadioVisions*.

"Composition in Real Time" focused on improvisation as an experimental art. Musicians featured included Ornette Coleman, Anthony Braxton, Leo Smith, George Lewis, Derek Bailey (an example of how this improvisation had "taken hold in Europe"), Japanese composer Takehisa Kosugi (mentioning his work with Merce Cunningham), and Pauline Oliveros. While presenting exciting music, the segment also unfortunately served to cordon off the music of black artists under the trope of "improvisation," part of a larger historiographic trend in the construction of experimentalism where discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity help to construct ostensibly purely musical categories.<sup>47</sup> The promotional materials cited Lewis, who (in the words of the press release) "suggest[ed] that the distinctions between structured composition and spontaneous composition (improvisation) 'are increasingly artificial.'"<sup>48</sup> While the musical material of the program may have respected Lewis's comment, the segment's positioning unfortunately enacted the same exclusion regarding experimentalism that Lewis has exposed in his scholarship, allowing the musical term "improvisation" to effectively perform the boundaries of experimentalism.

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<sup>46</sup> Transcribed from "Music in Reaction: The New Consonance," available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/RadioVisions>.

<sup>47</sup> See George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), and "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002): 215–246.

<sup>48</sup> *RadioVisions* Press Release, "'Composition in Real Time' Explores the Impact of Musical Improvisation," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, p. 2.



“Music in Real Time” was also the segment where NPR’s drive for the representation of diversity in programming was most evident in the institution’s paperwork. NPR’s “content summary” sheets requested information for each segment of *RadioVisions* regarding individual performers’ sex, race, and ethnicity (standard requests regarding individuals featured in NPR’s programming at the time). Producer Ray Gallon puckishly offered a critique of NPR’s curiosity.<sup>49</sup> His list read, “Karl Berger, German; George Lewis, Black; Roscoe Mitchell, Black; Earl Howard, Blind but White; Leo Smith, Black; Frederick Rzewski, White; Pauline Oliveros, Woman; Anthony Braxton, Black; Takehisa Kosugi, Japanese.”<sup>50</sup> Gallon then identified himself with a barrage of labels as “white/Russian/Polish/Mongolian/Canadian/Jewish/American.”<sup>51</sup> Finally, Gallon pushed NPR’s request for information further, adding “I don’t know if anyone in the program is gay.”<sup>52</sup> Gallon’s excessive labels pointed to the way that “Composition in Real Time” was comprised of music by artists who were “desirable” to represent on air because of their minority races, genders, and ethnicities, and his brazen reply mocked NPR’s probing forms designed to collect this information.

Two previously composed pieces received dedicated segments on *RadioVisions*: *Symmetries* by Tom Johnson and *Roaratorio* by John Cage. *Roaratorio* received its American premiere on *RadioVisions*, though only half of it was included.<sup>53</sup> It was introduced by Cage, who explained his conception of the piece as well as his thoughts on listening and ambient sound. The last commissioned regular segment of the series, “High Tech Etude,” closely responded to

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<sup>49</sup> Fortunately, the list stayed in house, as some of Gallon’s labels may be somewhat offensive in themselves.

<sup>50</sup> “Content Summary,” UMD NPR, Office of the General Counsel, Series 6, Box 7, Folder 10.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Given composers’ complaints about the lack of NPR support for new music, it was ironic that this piece had been premiered on German radio, and that NPR was then only able to rebroadcast half of it.

*RadioVisions*'s request for proposals in its approach to sound. Douglas Smith explained at the beginning of the program:

Radio can be the means for transmitting earlier art forms in a new way. Radio can also be another raw material or new art, such as that anticipated by Luigi Russolo in his "The Art of Noise" wherein all sound can be combined and manipulated to create works that are touching, laughable, evocative, or profound into art. We've sought out artists in our city who are working in an audio framework. The high tech recording environment. And we've asked them for works from their unique sensibilities that take the sound mass around us as their palette. The results range from the extremes of six simple notes to the sounds made as our city [Cincinnati] lives. The next fifty-five minutes is a response from thirty-six different people to the silence they have found.<sup>54</sup>

Notice the way that radio itself was approached as an instrument, as more than simply a delivery system. Smith referred to Russolo's "Art of Noise," an influential text from the early twentieth century, and invoked "silence" at the end of the quote as a reference to Cage's sonic philosophy.

Finally, "The Composer as Conductor" and "Notes from the Steel City" offered departures from the overall characterization of experimentalism in *RadioVisions*. The program description explained that the music of "Notes from the Steel City" was "in the 'mainstream' of contemporary classical composition," obliquely suggesting that there was an "outside position" that the other programs in *RadioVisions* occupied. The series concluded with an episode called "Where Do We Go From Here?" in which Schuller reviewed the music presented in *RadioVisions*. His survey was relatively traditional, and included a substantial dose of European musical history. But he specifically noted that the "renegade tradition" in America was well represented in the series, adding that America was a place where "revolutionary spirits and iconoclasts can flourish."<sup>55</sup> "Experimentalism" was presented as a rupture from tradition in Schuller's narrative, and as a distinctly American development.

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<sup>54</sup> Transcribed from "High Tech Etude."

<sup>55</sup> Program description, "RadioVisions Schedule," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

## Publicity and Press Coverage

*RadioVisions* had ample money for publicity (an anomalous situation for NPR's music programming in the late 1970s and early 1980s, according to Rathe), and thus the producers were able to promote *RadioVisions* extensively.<sup>56</sup> Member stations received a letter boasting that "*RadioVisions* is one of the most adventurous and forward thinking series National Public Radio has ever presented."<sup>57</sup> Because of the novelty of the series, NPR offered "more than the standard range of promotional materials," including program descriptions, biographies of musicians involved, photos, flyers, and two audio samplers (one twenty-five minutes, and another thirteen minutes long). NPR also prepared a thirty-second video featuring Schuller that was offered on public television. When the publicity materials for *RadioVisions* were distributed, the suggested spot copy sent to stations announced the sort of music that could be heard. Innovation became a selling point in the advertisement:

*RadioVisions*....Audio visions of new music, electronic art, the bold creative use of sound. Join *RadioVisions* each week as host Gunther Schuller takes you on an intriguing sound journey to hear the human voice, musical instruments, and the spoken word in ways you've never heard them before. From Henry Cowell, to John Cage, and beyond, *RadioVisions* spotlights a new partnership in music and audio art. Join the adventure of *RadioVisions*, from National Public Radio, each (day) at (time) here on (station/frequency).<sup>58</sup>

In addition to the adventure metaphors that hyped the newness of the music (even though some of it was actually half a century old), only two composers were named: Cowell and Cage. Their

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<sup>56</sup> See Joan La Barbara, "'RadioVisions'—NPR's Exploration of the World of Sound," *High Fidelity/Musical America* (December 1981): 13; Gretchen McNeese, "Radio," *Playboy* (November 1981): 40; "Music: New Airwaves," *Horizon: The Magazine of the Arts* (October, 1981); Greg Sandow, "Voice Centerfold," *Village Voice*, New York (Oct. 28–Nov. 3, 1981); and Gerald Gold, "Joyce-Cage 'Finnegan' on Air," *New York Times* (December 31, 1981).

<sup>57</sup> "*RadioVisions* Press Release," Sarah Carlston, Letter of September 3, 1981, UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

<sup>58</sup> "*RadioVisions* Press Release: Suggested Spot Copy," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

names invoked the experimental tradition that promised such a tantalizing new auditory experience.

While attending the 1981 New Music America festival in Minneapolis, Rathe solicited additional press coverage for the series:

At the same time—this was around the same time as New Music America beginning—and John Rockwell and I were out at Minneapolis at the New Music America festival, and I was like, you know we’re doing this series, you know, if you really want to support these musicians, you could do something about this. And sure enough, [Michael Anthony] ... called me up and said I’ve been commissioned by John Rockwell to do a piece on *RadioVisions* for the Sunday [New York] Times, and damned if they didn’t do...the better part—two thirds of a page!—about *RadioVisions* as a new music series. And NPR hardly ever got that kind of notice for stuff they were doing before.<sup>59</sup>

Anthony’s publicity piece in the *New York Times* extended the construction of experimentalism presented in the show. He drew attention to the composers who were omitted, and included

Rathe’s response:

...conspicuously absent are the so-called academic composers, the serialists, the esthetic descendents of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg. ... Says Mr. Rathe, “... I would admit... that we focus largely on the people who have gone beyond serialism. We focus on composers who have in fact begun to garner large and enthusiastic audiences well beyond the new-music community.”<sup>60</sup>

It is notable that Rathe’s answer came back to the *listeners*: He explained that the composers featured in *RadioVisions* had “begun to garner large and enthusiastic audiences well beyond the new-music community.” If these composers had attracted audiences beyond their ardent followers, and in American cities other than New York, perhaps their music could do the same for NPR.

The contrast between “academic composers” or “serialists,” and more popular composers of new music mentioned by Rathe was related to the ascendance of New York’s thriving

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Rathe.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Anthony, “A New NPR Series Tunes in New Music,” *New York Times* (October 11, 1981).

downtown as a musical force in the early 1980s. Increasingly, serialism and the academy were viewed as the oppressive, “uptown” establishment, with the populist experimentalism of downtown cast in opposition.<sup>61</sup> The “new music” of *RadioVisions* was similar to that presented in the New Music America festivals held in various cities each year from 1980 to 1990—a festival that grew out of musical activity in downtown New York (called “New Music New York” in 1979). Writing in the New Music America catalog in 1980, John Rockwell promoted the festival as “a protest against the cerebral, intellectualized style of music-making favored not only by Pierre Boulez and the post-Webernian ‘total Serialists’ of Europe, but by their academic acolytes in the America Northeast.”<sup>62</sup> And, continuing this characterization, Kent Devereaux stated that “in many ways New Music America was seen as vindication for an entire tradition of American ‘experimentalist’ composers and their disciples who had been shut out of the concert hall.”<sup>63</sup> Thus *RadioVisions* reflected broader perceptions of music in the early 1980s, and shared some of the anti-establishment characterization of “experimentalism” that fueled the New Music America festivals.

In the first part of this chapter, I have outlined the musical-historical narrative presented in *RadioVisions* and traced multiple influences that contributed to the show’s canon of “new music.” The show’s focus on American experimentalism was the result of the musical passions of the individuals involved with the project; the shared sonic ideals of experimental music and radio; the show’s historical circumstances (especially in relation to the first New Music America

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<sup>61</sup> See Kyle Gann, “The Importance of Being Downtown,” in *Music Downtown*, 1–15. The actual “dominance” of serialism has been questioned. See Joseph N. Straus, “The Myth of Serial ‘Tyranny’ in the 1950s and 1960s,” *The Musical Quarterly* 83/3 (1999): 301–343. Regardless, its power has been extensive. See Anne C. Shreffler, “The Myth of Empirical Historiography: A Response to Joseph N. Straus,” *The Musical Quarterly* 84/1 (2000): 30–39.

<sup>62</sup> John Rockwell, quoted in Kent Devereaux, “The Twin Cities—Twelve Years After,” *New Music Across America*, ed. Iris Brooks (California Institute of the Arts/High Performance Books, 1992), 12.

<sup>63</sup> Devereaux, “The Twin Cities,” 14.

festival in Minneapolis); as well as the series' production at NPR, its radio distribution, and its marketability. It is this last trio of NPR influences I would like to consider in the remainder of this chapter. How might the new music of *RadioVisions* relate to NPR's desired audience?

NPR's imaginary listeners were essential during *RadioVisions*'s planning phase: in the conception of the show, in the grant proposal, and in the show's structure (especially in the choice to use a host and the inclusion of narration). To further explore the relationship between American musical experimentalism and an imagined public radio audience, I turn to the imaginary listeners haunting *RadioVisions*'s first segment: "The Challenge."

### **Projecting Listeners on Air: "The Challenge"**

"The Challenge"—a hyper-reflexive, half-hour prelude to *RadioVisions* that focused on public radio and "experimental, unusual, and avant-garde" music—offered an assessment of the state of contemporary music on public radio stations. It was built around a sampling of interviews from radio hosts across the country and identified "the listeners" as the ultimate determining factor for contemporary music programming. The first sound heard in "The Challenge" jarringly called attention to its creative medium; it began by imitating the swirling search of a radio tuner. A burst of fuzzy static told the listener that the sounds heard were *about* radio. And from the very first moment of static, that radio had a listener—a listener who was trying to locate a particular frequency. Eventually the imaginary swirler-of-the-dial settled on a pianist playing Rachmaninoff, presumably choosing a public radio station that was dedicated primarily to classical music.

The music receded and an interview with an anonymous public radio host began. The host's curt assertions allowed a listener to imagine an audience that had very conservative

musical tastes, which constructed a backdrop against which more progressive listeners could be positioned. The host introduced one of the central conundrums of the program: the problem of attracting listeners with potentially unattractive sounds. The listener then learned that that public radio had—at times, contradictory—responsibilities to program according to listeners’ preferences, to invest in/support “the arts,” and to educate their audience. Enter the theme music/audio logo for *RadioVisions*, composed by John Ramo and Zenon Slawinsky. Synthesizer, prepared piano, and prepared guitar played a consonant, repeating pattern that evoked minimalism, while sweeping glissandi recalled Cowell’s “Aeolian Harp.” Gunther Schuller’s voice announced the logo calmly and authoritatively: “This is *RadioVisions*.”

There was no question among the speakers interviewed in “The Challenge” that public radio had a responsibility to support new music. The problem in presenting it was “the listener,” and there were two types, according to speakers in “The Challenge.” The first type was uninitiated, but curious and grateful. One radio host insisted: “people are definitely interested. And they, in fact, have told us in the letters that they appreciate the opportunity to actually have a chance to listen to this...”<sup>64</sup> Another radio host mentioned glowing phrases from his listeners such as: “I didn’t know I would like this kind of music;” “Thank you for shaking up my preconceived notions of what contemporary music is like;” “It’s not all ‘bloop bleep’, thank god.” And, “I haven’t tried [new music] before but you’ve got me hooked, I’m willing to try more.” It is unclear whether these were actual quotations from listeners, or whether they were (possibly creatively embellished) recollections from the radio hosts.

The other type of listener in “The Challenge” was presented as a belligerent caricature: unwilling to try the new listening experience, and angry about being asked to do so. One host

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<sup>64</sup> Transcribed from “The Challenge.”

complained of receiving “letters that violently assault you,” and of “brickbats.” Because only these two types of listeners were described in “The Challenge,” the program seemed to be targeting the listener who was new to contemporary music. There was no mention of listeners who were, themselves, experts or fans of new music in “The Challenge.” Interestingly, the show’s advisory panel had insisted that the producers’ program submissions should appeal to both the “newcomer” *and* the “aficionado” of new music. In actuality, the shows were likely successful in this regard. But the “aficionado” never became part of NPR’s pitch for *RadioVisions*. In “The Challenge,” the ideal listeners were those who would benefit from the curation of sound provided by *RadioVisions*, learning from the commentary that made the unknown music less intimidating.

The last part of “The Challenge” turned to NPR specifically, quoting its statement of purposes, and presenting *RadioVisions* as a product that dealt directly with the problem of contemporary music on public radio. After a brief etude on NPR’s mission statement, where the phrases were layered into a text-sound composition, Rathe announced:

In the fall of 1979, National Public Radio, aware of the problems and the possibilities that contemporary music has offered to public broadcasters, and cognizant of the variety of new works which have never been heard on the air, entered into a partnership with ZBS Media and WXXI FM to develop *RadioVisions*—thirteen programs designed to apply all the creativity that public radio producers could offer.<sup>65</sup>

Presenting the series in this manner, after excerpts from the mission statement, tied *RadioVisions* closely to NPR and the ideals of its founders. It also marked the series as an NPR product. “The Challenge” projected an audience for the upcoming *RadioVisions* shows comprised of open-minded, uninitiated, and curious individuals. These were the sought-after “new listeners” to whom the grant proposal referred.

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<sup>65</sup> Transcribed from “The Challenge.”



## Imagined Listeners: New to Experimental Music, or New to Public Radio?

*RadioVisions* did not consistently use the label “experimental” as I have here; rather, the show used the words “innovative,” avant-garde, “new,” and “experimental” equally and interchangeably to highlight the special qualities of the new music presented. I am homing in on the word “experimental” in order to show how the curation of *RadioVisions* can be mapped onto musicological and journalistic writing on “American experimentalism.” As discussed briefly in the introduction, the term “experimentalism” has been used to collect a canon that is tinged with rebellion, placing a premium on innovation, unconventionality, and exploration. The gold standard for measuring those qualities has long been the weight of the European musical tradition. Many writers have shown how this characterization is not simply retroactive; it could be heard in Cowell’s writing on Ives, and in Ives’s own blustery pronouncements about the birth of American music (and its masculine nature).<sup>66</sup> Other writers have astutely deconstructed the language that has hemmed in the borders of American experimental music, finding that the barriers to inclusion have often been linked to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, the image of the rugged, individualist, maverick composer (with corresponding adjectives attached to his—and, rarely, her—musical idioms) in American experimental music has persisted. In the second half of the twentieth century, and outside the United States’ borders,

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<sup>66</sup> See Judith Tick, “Charles Ives and Gender Ideology,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 83–106; Henry Cowell, “Charles Ives,” *American Composers on American Music* (1933), 128–145, reprinted in *Essential Cowell, Selected Writings on Music 1921–1964*, ed. by Dick Higgins (Kingston, NY: Documentext, 2001), 51; and Michael Broyles, *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>67</sup> See Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*; Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Jonathan Katz, “John Cage’s Queer Silence, or How to Avoid Making Matters Worse,” *GLQ* 5/2 (1999), 232–51. For more on the problems of defining “experimentalism,” see Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), especially pp. 1–19.

an “experimental” music was constructed by cultural ambassadors selling American values to post-WWII Germany, as well as by those (including the U.S. government) who were employing it as a stealth weapon in the Cold War.<sup>68</sup> During the 1960s, the overlapping of experimental music, theater, and performance art further emphasized experimental music’s affiliations with an oppositional and political art rooted in innovation.<sup>69</sup> Later in the 1970s and 1980s, associations in downtown New York City between post-Cagian experimental music, punk, new wave, and loft jazz did the same. These connections, combined with reiterated and fossilized rhetoric from the early twentieth century and the social/aesthetic affiliations of many contemporary composers, contributed to the continued characterization of experimental music as a practice that is opposed to a dominant structure.

NPR could benefit from this “experimentalism” because there was a slippery double meaning for “new listeners” during *RadioVisions*’s production and promotion: in “The Challenge” the target listeners were new to experimental music; and in the NPR proposal materials, the target listeners were new to public radio. It is significant that these two types of new listeners could be so easily interchanged, and their conflation points to two main ways that experimentalism was useful for projecting a larger NPR audience.

First, listeners who might appreciate experimentalism’s supposed position “outside” the mainstream might also appreciate the way that public radio was presented as an alternative to commercial stations. More specifically, public radio’s anti-commercial position is similar to the anti-commercialism prevalent in new music circles, as both composers and public radio

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<sup>68</sup> On American experimental music in post-WWII Germany, see Amy C. Beal, “Negotiating Cultural Allies: American Music in Darmstadt, 1946-1956,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53/1 (Spring, 2000), 105-139; and Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

producers made products where monetary value was not the prime indicator of success.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, in the music and art worlds, monetary value is (initially) shunned as part of an “economy of disavowal.” Artistic value is assumed by a specific “position-taking:” denying economic success in the short term in the hopes of accumulating cultural capital (aesthetic value), which will then transform into increased economic success in the long term.<sup>70</sup>

While this strategy of disavowal (for Bourdieu) is writ large across the art world, it has also helped structure American experimentalism’s founding stories. It was present from the outset, for example, in narratives that celebrated Ives’s role as an insurance salesman who had the freedom to not pander to audiences. Writing in 1933, Henry Bellamann explained that Ives “chose business [as a profession], and not the least important reason was that the exigencies of music, practised professionally, should not hamper him in writing as he chose.”<sup>71</sup> Bellamann’s narrative nicely describes Ives’s practical solution to the precarious social position of “composer,” but it also serves to bolster his music’s experimental value, as the music need not be compromised in an attempt to garner income.

Bourdieu’s sophisticated analysis of the business of art cannot be mapped onto the world of public radio in any one-to-one relationship. There are notable differences, including public radio’s immediacy (as opposed to the appreciation of value for a painting over time) and less concern with resale of programming (as opposed to resale of art/music). Yet it is possible to locate a modified “economy of disavowal” structuring the value of NPR’s programming through its antagonistic relationship to commercialism. In part, this antagonism to commercialism stems from the history of the medium of radio in general, and public radio’s emergence in particular.

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<sup>70</sup> See Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29–73.

<sup>71</sup> Henry Bellamann, “Charles Ives: The Man and His Music,” *Musical Quarterly* 19/1 (January 1933): 45–47.

As Kevin Whiteyes Shroth has summarized, “The history of radio in the United States has been centrally a history of the struggles with the specter of commercialism.”<sup>72</sup> He explains that:

by and large American media scholars have characterized radio’s origins as a brief period of “amateur” experimentation in the 1910’s and 20s, followed by the rise of corporate domination of the airwaves in the wake of government regulation in 1927 and again in 1934.<sup>73</sup>

When NPR was founded in 1970, its “Purposes” vowed that the institution would:

not regard its audience as a “market” or in terms of its disposable income, but as curious, complex individuals... The listener turning from a commercial station to [NPR] should sense a difference.<sup>74</sup>

NPR has had an uncomfortable relationship with money throughout its history: needing money for successful operation, but also requiring distance from its “other” of commercial radio.<sup>75</sup>

Although NPR’s pledge drives and “underwriting” might suggest otherwise, their money-making operations have been undertaken with the understanding that such fundraising is a necessary evil.

This difficult position is evident in an emphasis on programming and content rather than profit-maximizing market strategies. I return to Mankiewicz’s quote in the Annual Report of 1981, where he argued that the expanded audience was the result of *programming*, not marketing:

This surge in listenership is even more significant because it did not result from increase in signal capacity, technological innovation, or entry into new markets—factors which usually precede and effect radio audience growth. Our astonishing audience gain resulted

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<sup>72</sup> Kevin Whiteyes Shroth, *Bakhtinian Aesthetics and Authorship in the Journalism of National Public Radio* (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2009), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>74</sup> William Siemerling, “National Public Radio Purposes,” UMD NPR, Elizabeth Young Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> This is evident in the way that commercial influence was adamantly denied in the face of common knowledge about advertising. As Ralph Engelman writes, when approving “enhanced underwriting” for NPR, “the FCC sought to maintain a distinction between underwriting and advertising by banning salesmanship and price information, ignoring the fact that a major form of modern advertising involved enhancing a company’s image rather than a hard sell...” See Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 117.

from the ability of NPR and member stations to meet the needs of the American public by providing a wealth of quality programming unavailable elsewhere.<sup>76</sup>

The emphasis on programming is accompanied by a turn away from “typical” audience growth, whether through technological innovation or through “entry into new markets.” This anti-commercial stance in turn granted additional cultural capital to NPR’s programs.

The value placed on substantive programming in public radio (and the idea that marketing and advertising are the primary markers of commercial radio) is likely responsible for some of the critiques of NPR over the years; especially those regarding their underwriting policies.<sup>77</sup> Writing a piece for the *Washington Post* in 1989, Marc Fisher included a provocative section header in his article: “Underwriting the News: There Are No Ads on Public Radio. Or are There?” continuing:

Plenty of foundations and companies pay to have their names and slogans read at the end of each show. Most seem to contribute out of charity and goodwill. But some NPR staffers say they'd sometimes rather run commercials than deal with public radio's latest fund-raising technique.<sup>78</sup>

Interestingly, even NPR’s audience research was occasionally viewed as a betrayal of its ideals for quality programming. McCauley discussed David Giovanonni’s arrival in 1979 for audience research in his dissertation, arguing that some at NPR saw this as “selling out.”<sup>79</sup> And Fisher cited a similar response to audience research and news:

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<sup>76</sup> Mankiewicz, “President’s Letter” (National Public Radio, *Annual Report*, 1981), 2.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Peter P. Niekarcz III, “*All Things Considered*”: A Comparative Case Study Examining the Commercial Presence Within Public Radio (Ph.D. diss., Western Michigan University, 1999).

<sup>78</sup> Marc Fisher, “The Soul of a News Machine,” *The Washington Post* (October 22, 1989).

<sup>79</sup> McCauley also concedes that the new audience research seems to have worked, citing NPR’s growing audience. See *From the Margins to the Mainstream: The History of National Public Radio* (Ph.D. diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997). The problem was augmented because Giovanonni’s studies—especially those in 1985 and 1988 using demographics and “lifestyle segmentation” as their basis—were used to “woo underwriters by indicating the resources and influence of the audience hearing their financial support acknowledged on air.” See Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 118.

While NPR management pushes to attract new listeners by paying consultants to convene focus groups and create TV and magazine ads, there is grumbling even among public radio's board of directors. When director Richard Salant, former head of CBS News, heard of plans for "product testing" to see if audiences want changes in "Morning Edition," he grumbled, "In my shop, if you called news 'product,' you had to wash your mouth out with soap."<sup>80</sup>

The question is not whether NPR made a "product," but rather why that word had such negative associations when associated with its programming. No doubt this stemmed in part from the important conception that news is not for sale, and from its employees' high standards of journalism. Yet the negative association of attaching commercial value to programming extended beyond the network's journalism. According to Jack Mitchell, "being noncommercial and not-for-profit translates as having integrity and being sincere to public radio listeners."<sup>81</sup> Likewise, Peter Nieckarz suggests that "resisting commercialism" is equivalent to remaining "true to the original ideals of public radio."<sup>82</sup> Not coincidentally, these are also central phrases that could create cultural value for the institution's programs. The (non-commercial) prestige of new music could confer its artistic prestige to the (noncommercial) programming of NPR.<sup>83</sup> *RadioVisions's* emphasis on progressive listening (understanding and appreciating the unpopular) and the avant-garde qualities of the music also served as advertising sells that emphasized the institution's

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<sup>80</sup> Fisher, "The Soul of a News Machine."

<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 191. Mitchell also admits that "In time, those listeners pulled to NPR by the magnet of Siemering's values formed the particularly desirable 'market' of public radio." Yet he acknowledges that "creating a market was never [Siemering's] intention" (66).

<sup>82</sup> Nieckarz III, "All Things Considered," i.

<sup>83</sup> The authors of the *New Grove* entry on radio briefly suggest that classical music could serve the purpose of generating prestige. "Concert music lent prestige to music broadcasts, and networks vied for famous singers and conductors; personalities became more important than the quality of the music." See Siegfried Goslich, et al. "Radio," in *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42011> (accessed September 5, 2011).

commitment to offering an alternative to commercial and mainstream stations, as well as drawing the prestige of the music to the programming.

Second, the strong national identity projected in *RadioVisions*'s version of experimentalism was often constructed through multicultural borrowing. The show (through the rhetoric of its composers and producers) paradoxically presented non-Western musics as the building blocks of American music in an effort to find non-European sources for a new national music. NPR was concerned with a similar difficulty in its quest for national relevance: appealing to a large national audience, yet maintaining diverse programs that would appeal to the special interests of diverse smaller groups (a local diversity often abandoned by commercial networks). This goal continued to guide programming, and became what Thomas McCourt called "the central paradox of public broadcasting": the need for "universality of appeal versus representation of diversity."<sup>84</sup> Ralph Engelman has explained,

The airwaves of public radio could provide recognition and legitimacy for the aspirations of ethnic and racial minorities. ... NPR shared the Carnegie Commission's conception of public broadcasting as a social instrument to reaffirm and to strengthen American democracy politically and culturally. NPR's public affairs and cultural programming could, at once, highlight American pluralism and help reintegrate a fragmented society.<sup>85</sup>

Thus he tied Siemerling's "Purposes" back to the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 through the Carnegie Commission, obliquely suggesting that the very birth of public radio could be connected to the racial foment of the 1960s in its attempt to "reintegrate a fragmented society." NPR's "Purposes" had proposed that "a sense of the cultural diversity [in the U.S.] could be achieved by programs featuring the music of the different ethnic groups across the country."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas Michael McCourt, *National Public Radio and the Rationalization of the Public* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996), vi.

<sup>85</sup> Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 91.

<sup>86</sup> Siemerling, "National Public Radio Purposes," NPBA EYP, Box 1, Folder 11.

*RadioVisions*, however, did more than simply “feature musics of different ethnic groups”: it assimilated non-Western musics into a new “American” music. The version of musical experimentalism presented in *RadioVisions*—with its strong construction of American identity and its sonic representations of multicultural influences—could magically and successfully (even if problematically and very temporarily) solve this paradox.

### ***RadioVisions*’s Resonance**

*RadioVisions* presented a *fairly* inclusive version of experimentalism. While it heavily favored New York’s downtown, it also covered musical activities in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh; it presented one episode on traditional orchestral music; and it included a segment on experimental “jazz and creative music” (although as noted above, the series still unfortunately used these words to encode race and ethnicity). It is also notable that—except for the “founding fathers” who exclusively dominate the first three segments—women had a significant presence in *RadioVisions*, both as composers *and* producers.

*RadioVisions* was distributed to NPR’s 264 member stations in the fall of 1981. The final report to the NEA deemed the project a success, citing “excellent member-station carriage of the series.” Yet of the 157 stations who responded to NPR’s programming survey for the fall of 1981, only half had carried *RadioVisions*. The majority of those stations felt that the series was “above average programming,” but only eleven percent noted any extra audience response—positive or negative (the survey did not specify). Several stations did report emphatically negative responses; and one station reported that it had declined to carry the series because listeners had complained about contemporary music programming in the past. A letter from 1984 on the rebroadcast of *RadioVisions* suggests that new music was not the most popular

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programming. WUFT-FM (Florida) sent a report to NPR included in the document “Station Program Evaluation, Fiscal 1984 (Fall 1983 & Spring 1984)” :

We’re delighted to observe the upswing in Arts and Performance offerings, though the numbers are skewed by the amount of repeats. The return of RADIOVISIONS and my awareness of another NEW SOUNDS USA series in the offing makes me question some of the well-meaning NPR philosophy: are the stations being told, again, that Performance knows our audiences better than ourselves, Audience Research, or the RRC? With what little money is available, should any of it go to projects that will be used by 10% of the membership, or less?<sup>87</sup>

Thus, experimental music was not used on a large scale as part of a strategy for NPR to build an audience. Certainly, the audience response data cited above indicated that new music was not the best way to achieve that goal. And the bulk of NPR’s energy was devoted to the news programming that had gained national attention and helped establish a distinctive on-air identity for the organization. But experimentalism’s potential for imagining an NPR audience guided the development of *RadioVisions* and facilitated its broadcast. This potential also allowed “new music” to become “American experimental music” as the *RadioVisions* project moved through the infrastructure of NPR. *RadioVisions*’s experimentalism offered NPR an American individualistic—yet simultaneously diverse and populist—music as an artistic product, projecting new listeners who would value the sounds of American experimentalism *and* the sounds of NPR.

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<sup>87</sup> See “Station Program Evaluation, Fiscal 1984 (Fall 1983 & Spring 1984),” p. 42, “Comments on Improvement or Deterioration in NPR Quality and Balance,” UMD NPR, Station Program Evaluation Series 6: Box 3, Folder 3. *New Sounds USA* consisted of coverage of the New Music America festival, and it was funded by the Satellite Program Development Fund.

### Chapter 3

#### VOCAL PRESENCE AND AUTHORITY IN *RADIOVISIONS*: “SHOPTALK,” “DETAILS AT ELEVEN,” AND “THE OLDEST INSTRUMENT”

As if impersonating a new-music evangelist, Gunther Schuller dramatically proclaimed a gospel of text-sound on air for *RadioVisions*, announcing “In the beginning was the word.”<sup>1</sup> He informed listeners that making music out of spoken words was an important new compositional technique, based on the ancient human practice of speech. His clever, biblical introduction provided rhetorical flair, but it also offered a fair assessment of one important trend in contemporary music. Words—and perhaps even more importantly in the age of recording technology, *voices*—have indeed provided material for musical experimentalists working in the twentieth century, primarily because of their power to invoke the authority of the “real.”<sup>2</sup> From Steve Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966)—ostensibly experiments in form and phasing, but essentially projects playing with language and identity<sup>3</sup>—to John Adams’s *Christian Zeal and Activity* (1973), to Alvin Lucier’s *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969), and the many voice/text compositions featured in the 1980s tape magazine *Tellus*, recorded voices increasingly populated American experimental music in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:1, transcribed from “The Challenge” promotional spot.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Reich has attested to the lure of the “real” in his work, writing, “Using the voice of individual speakers is not like setting a text—it’s setting a human being. A human being is personified by his or her voice. If you record me, my cadences, the way I speak are just as much me as any photograph of me. When other people listen to that they feel a persona present.” *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, ed. Paul Hiller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>3</sup> On the play of language and identity in these pieces, see Sumanth Gopinath, *Contraband Children: The Politics of Race and Liberation in the Music of Steve Reich, 1965–1966* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2005), and Martin Scherzinger, “Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic: Steve Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain*,” *Current Musicology* 79 & 80 (2005): 207–44.

<sup>4</sup> *Tellus* was an audio cassette magazine offered by subscription beginning in 1983, documenting the downtown New York music scene and supporting composers’ work. The contents of *Tellus* No. 7, “The Word I” (1983) are especially relevant. See *Tellus*’s online archives at <http://www.ubu.com/sound/tellus.html>.

In addition to describing wider compositional practices, Schuller was also specifically introducing three consecutive *RadioVisions* shows that featured the spoken word in new music: “Shoptalk” (produced and composed by Peter Gordon), “Details at Eleven” (produced and composed by Laurie Anderson and John Giorno), and “The Oldest Instrument” (produced and partially composed by Joan La Barbara). The notion of “voice” became a powerful and multivalent construct in *RadioVisions*, both as a topic of musical composition and as an essential material of radio broadcasting. This chapter explores the cultural valences and authorities of the musical voices in these three shows, as well as Schuller’s hosting voice in the context of public radio broadcasting. I begin by comparing Schuller’s vocal projection to NPR’s broadcasting ideals and practices. By surveying newspaper articles, NPR publications/manuals, and scholarship on the institution, I argue that defining sonic norms have emerged from NPR’s chorus of broadcast voices, and that these norms framed the music of *RadioVisions*. Schuller provided a “public radio” voice of authority for *RadioVisions*, offering musical expertise, a pleasant vocal timbre, and familiarity to his audience through his implied performing/composing mind and body. Next, I show how the recorded voices featured in these three shows contributed various authorities, personae, and presences that propped up the producers’ and hosts’ characterization of the music as new and experimental. In Peter Gordon’s “Shoptalk,” voices conjured the authority of the composer’s creative presence and influences. In Anderson and Giorno’s “Details at Eleven,” voices were simultaneously technological “voices of the future” and reminders of the sonic mundane that underpinned a Cagian approach to ambient sound. La Barbara’s presentation of “The Oldest Instrument” positioned voices as “primal” and “authentic” utterances emanating from bodies in order to establish ancient roots for the new vocal sounds presented on the show. I conclude that the tropes invoked by these voices, in addition to

Schuller's commentary, continued to align the American experimentalism presented on *RadioVisions* with a broader notion of experimentalism exemplified by the New Music America festivals and activities in downtown New York City. In *RadioVisions*, the spoken word/voice became a way to perform an American experimentalism that was fundamentally populist, and simultaneously ancient and new.

### The Word and the Body

In her genealogy of the “voice of authority” on radio, Francis Dyson isolates the same biblical verse that Schuller used on *RadioVisions*, and explains it as key to decoding the voice's authority:

Indeed, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God—origin and explanation of all things. In Christian theology the Word is made flesh, becoming the Logos... deliverer of God's law. The Logos in both pre- and post-Christian usage, [*sic*] is the precursor of the modern concept of logic as reason, order and law, all characteristics of meaningful speech, all found in abundance in the voice of authority, yet all abstract concepts existing independently of vocal utterance.<sup>5</sup>

For Dyson, this ubiquitous interpretation of the Word—as law, speech, meaning, and knowledge—generates the authority of the broadcast voice.<sup>6</sup> This voice of authority loses its connection to an uttering body: it is “dematerialized.”<sup>7</sup> It is the voice she labels “proper” because it “is devoid of unintentional sound—the cough or the clicking of the tongue, and as such, it

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<sup>5</sup> Frances Dyson, “The Genealogy of the Radio Voice,” in *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound, and Transmission*, ed. Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander (Banff, Canada: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1994), 168.

<sup>6</sup> Dyson argues that the same voice, in abstraction, is essential for “a philosophical discourse bent on arriving at certainty” (168). Here, her argument resonates with other powerful critiques of the power of the word (and by extension, the visual), especially in Western philosophy. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Spivak, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) and *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978 [1967]); and Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Dyson, “The Genealogy of the Radio Voice,” 173.

bears no traces of the body, representing or voicing, only the signifying image.”<sup>8</sup> In Dyson’s critique, the broadcast voice’s connection to the mind and its subsequent disembodiment is the very quality that generates authority. She also ties radio’s “voice of authority” to its “interiority” and temporality, both of which result in aural presence for the listener: “Interiority, presented through aurality, stands *for* presence and truth: the veracity of the here-and-now and *against* absence, simulation and representation.”<sup>9</sup> Dyson shows how this “voice of authority” is not really concerned with material *sound* at all, and she aims to return “the voice to sound, and speech to the forbidden arena of rumour, gossip, hear/say” as a way to counter “the weighty silence with which the voice of authority smothers us daily.”<sup>10</sup> Radio art provides Dyson with a solution: through its artistic presentation of voices it can focus on “the saying” rather than “the said,” and thus it can undermine radio’s “voice of authority.”

On one hand, Dyson’s work reinforces the idea that only “unintentional sound” reveals the body: “the cough or the clicking of the tongue.” Thus, we hear bodies because of their non-speech utterances, and a sonic voice would need such noises to reveal its bodily source. This model rehearses the old binary of (primal) bodies that provide a foil for language and the word. Indeed, as I will argue regarding *RadioVisions*, when musical voices carry the burden of invoking “the real,” they are often laden with tics, bodily sounds, and pauses, or at the very least they are ensconced in ambient sounds evoking place. Yet this is merely one way to summon the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 174. See also Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Steven Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179–89. The notion of “bodylessness” is central to hearing the “acousmatic.” See for example, Carolyn Abbate in her chapter “Debussy’s Phantom Sounds” from *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 145–84, especially 148–53. See also Cathy Cox, “Listening to Acousmatic Music” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Dyson, “The Genealogy of the Radio Voice,” 177.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 168.

authority of bodies, identities, and personae.<sup>11</sup> Such a divide—where language is an inevitable marker of mind, while non-linguistic vocal sound is a marker for the body—is one that I challenge in this dissertation, especially in chapter 5.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Dyson's proposed solution to the hegemony of a "voice of authority" (that is, focusing on gossip, hearsay, and flux in radio art) offers a sophisticated turn away from the tired binary that underpins her argument. She recognizes that simply reinserting audible markers of bodies results in only emphasizing the other side of the binary, and thus she turns toward a different way of hearing. The most important question raised by Dyson's critique is one of authority, whether this authority comes from "the word," the body, or elsewhere. Dyson's work can be expanded beyond the single, dominant "voice of authority" she concentrates on in her essay to the ways in which *all* voices can carry authority. Listening for this authority is a more nuanced way of hearing voices, admitting the power of implied bodies, mind, *and* language. In this chapter, I ask, "how did voiced words establish musical and journalistic authority on *RadioVisions*?" Like Dyson, I listen for "the saying" in *RadioVisions* and emphasize the sonic aspects of the voice, but I do this without excluding "the said," careful not to privilege bodily sounds over linguistic sounds. In the case of *RadioVisions*, voices were heard in two overlapping contexts: the broadcast voices of authority comprising National Public Radio programming, and as the musical fabric of new compositions.

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<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Paul Sanden argues that these "bodily" sounds construct liveness in Glenn Gould's recorded music. See Paul Sanden, "Hearing Glenn Gould's Body: Corporeal Liveness in Recorded Music," *Current Musicology* 88 (2009): 7–34. See also Jairo Moreno, "Body'n'Soul?: Voice and Movement in Keith Jarrett's Pianism," *Musical Quarterly* (1999) 83/1: 75–92.

<sup>12</sup> My critique is based on the work of Adriana Cavarero. See her *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, translated by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

## NPR and Its Voices of Authority

Roasting NPR's fundraising through a pointed stereotype, comedian John Oliver cleverly and sarcastically encapsulated an "NPR sound":

This is *N-P-R*. They do fundraisers eleven months out of the year. How much do you *really* think their shows cost to produce? You buy a tape recorder, hire someone with a quirky voice, and then just pocket the rest. *Cha-ching!*<sup>13</sup>

Oliver's reductive recipe for NPR's sound—recorded sounds plus a speaker with a "quirky voice"—smartly shows one way that public radio voices (and NPR's voices in particular) have differed from the broadcast voices of commercial radio. Rather than the "proper voices"<sup>14</sup> that have ostensibly crowded commercial radio, NPR has been proud to include voices that were marked by sonic indicators of multiple dialects, ethnicities, races, and genders. These were voices that had a projected *identity* to market to listeners.

The emphasis on identity stems, in part, from NPR's original ideals, and especially its founders' vision for its relationship to journalism on commercial networks. William Siemering's journalistic mission in NPR's purposes was practical:

Because National Public Radio begins with no identity of its own it is essential that a daily product of excellence be developed. This may contain some hard news, but the primary emphasis would be on interpretation, investigative reporting on public affairs, the world of ideas and the arts.<sup>15</sup>

This "daily product" would soon be *All Things Considered* (ATC). Although Siemering also insisted that "in its journalistic mode, National Public Radio will actively explore, investigate

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<sup>13</sup> John Oliver, "NPR Staffing Decision," *The Daily Show*, October 25, 2010, <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-october-25-2010/npr-staffing-decision-2010>.

<sup>14</sup> See Dyson, "The Genealogy of the Radio Voice," 174. As noted above, these "proper voices" were not marked by bodily tics and seldom revealed regional or ethnic diversity. It is important to note that in spite of Dyson's generalization, commercial radio voices have never been entirely monolithic.

<sup>15</sup> William H. Siemering, "National Public Radio Purposes," National Public Broadcasting Archives, UMD, Elizabeth Young Papers (hereafter NPBA EYP), Box 1, Folder 11, p. 4.

and interpret issues of national and international import,” this type of investigative and firsthand journalism would be expanded later in the institution’s history. In its early years, NPR had neither the funding nor staff to undertake large-scale investigative reporting. As conceived by NPR’s founders, commercial networks would provide basic news for the listener, and NPR would help the listener make sense of it based on thoughtful analysis. According to Jack Mitchell, the first producer of *ATC*, Siemering focused on the “why, how, and who,” instead of the “what, where, and when” of events.<sup>16</sup>

The news analysis offered by NPR in its flagship program was also highly dependent on the personality of its host for success. *ATC* was “personality-driven” in the beginning, relying on its hosts for its tone and appeal.<sup>17</sup> The presence of Susan Stamberg as host of *ATC* is often cited as sonically separating NPR from its commercial counterparts. Lisa Phillips describes Stamberg’s voice as:

nasal, quizzical, unashamedly female. It was a voice with a hometown—New York—and an ethnicity—Jewish. It was a voice with a distinct sense of timing and artfully exaggerated way of emphasizing words and phrases. She even broke some of broadcasting’s golden rules. She said “um” if she had to take a moment to think of what to say next and “uh huh” during her guests’ responses.<sup>18</sup>

This type of marked (minority) identity was an early ideal for NPR’s founders. NPR’s “Purposes” asserted:

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<sup>16</sup> Jack W. Mitchell, *Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 65.

<sup>17</sup> Negative comments about the magazine’s early broadcasts were often related to the host, and included a dislike of host Robert Conley’s “rambling, self-involved delivery.” See Michael P. McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs of National Public Radio* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 30. Susan Stamberg helped shape *ATC* by arguing during its first month that it needed “personality” (30), and subsequently Mike Waters and Jim Russell became co-hosts. Soon after, Stamberg was added as a host. See also discussion of *ATC*’s early hosts by Mary Collins in *National Public Radio: The Cast of Characters* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1993), 26–27. Mitchell argues a number of NPR’s programs have been “idiosyncratic” and “personality-based,” *Listener Supported*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> Lisa A. Phillips, *Public Radio: Behind the Voices* (New York: CDS Books, 2006), 3.



The program [NPR's signature product] would be well paced, flexible, and a service primarily for a general audience. It would not, however, substitute superficial blandness for genuine diversity of regions, values, and cultural and ethnic minorities which comprise American society; it would speak with many voices and many dialects.<sup>19</sup>

Stamberg herself remembers Siemering emphasizing this point in an early meeting. He told her, "We want NPR to sound more relaxed. ...Conversational. We're going to talk to our listeners just the way we talk to our friends—simply, naturally. We don't want to be the all-knowing voices from the top of the mountain."<sup>20</sup> Linda Wertheimer remembers a similar story: "He [Siemering] decided that all kinds of people should speak on the radio, that owning a big bass voice would not be a prerequisite for presenting the news."<sup>21</sup>

These ideals continued to resonate at NPR throughout the 1970s. Identifiable gendered and ethnically marked voices on air were intended to mirror the diverse audience desired by the institution. In 1976, then-president Lee Frischknecht wrote a document criticizing the network's staff, arguing that they were "not airing sufficiently diverse voices" and that they were "ignoring the concerns of women and minorities."<sup>22</sup> Outside critiques have echoed this concern, arguing that NPR's commercial structure and growth resulted in a later "dearth of unprofessional voices...[and] a near total lack of regional accents and dialects too."<sup>23</sup> These criticisms imply that even in NPR's current incarnation, unprofessional voices, regional accents, and dialects *should* have a home at NPR.

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<sup>19</sup> Siemering, "Purposes," NPBA EYP, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Stamberg, "Introduction: In the Beginning there was Sound but No Chairs," in *This is NPR: The First Forty Years* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Wertheimer, "Introduction," in *Listening to America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin: 1995), xix.

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 80.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Riismandel, "Radio by and for the Public: The Death and Resurrection of Low-Power Radio," in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. M. Hilmes and J. Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 427, quoted in Kevin Whiteyes Shroth, *Bakhtinian Aesthetics and Authorship in the Journalism of National Public Radio* (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2009), 8.

The voice that launched *Morning Edition* (ME) in 1979 is a more precise contemporary comparison to *RadioVisions* because it coincided with the show's creation and broadcast. Host Bob Edwards lent a more typical "voice of authority" to ME than Stamberg did to ATC. Phillips describes Edwards's "stately presence and a deep voice slightly roughened by the Benson & Hedges menthol cigarettes he hustled outside to smoke on the street in front of NPR once an hour."<sup>24</sup> Edwards had a more typical broadcasting voice because it was recognizable as male and featured a deeper pitch. Yet his male voice was accompanied by the increasing number of strong female voices that were beginning to dominate ATC during the same time period: the newly hired Cokie Roberts, Nina Totenberg, and Linda Wertheimer. According to many accounts, their journalism and their polished, professional delivery style—though gendered female—still marked a turn away from the "quirky" and more conversational reporting style that could be heard earlier in the 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

Critics have argued that, over time, and as NPR grew and emphasized its news magazines, it gained a dominating broadcasting "Voice" that directly opposed its ideals. For example, Paul Riismandel argues that "the desire to appear just as competent and professional as commercial media has led to many public radio broadcasters adopting the polished intonation style common in the commercial broadcast industry."<sup>26</sup> One of the strongest critiques of an NPR "Voice" was delivered by Brian Montopoli (a former NPR intern) in 2003. He wrote:

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<sup>24</sup> Phillips, *Public Radio*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 38–39. See also Mary Collins' account of how *Morning Edition* "completely altered the direction of NPR," and her assessment that with this show, "Mankiewicz had placed the bow of the ship smack in the middle of the mainstream." *National Public Radio: The Cast of Characters*, 47. Collins is one of the few authors writing on NPR to openly discuss the gendered, stereotyped characterizations of NPR's female reporters. Stamberg was heard as "part mom, part friend" (27), while Cokie Roberts was "shielded from being stereotyped as a bitch" by her self-deprecating and witty comments (132).

<sup>26</sup> Riismandel, quoted in Shroth, *Bakhtinian Aesthetics*, 8.

The Voice is tough to describe, but you know it when you hear it: It's serious, carefully modulated, genially authoritative. It rings with unspoken knowledge of good wine and *The New York Times Book Review*. We [the other interns] were terrified of it.<sup>27</sup>

Montopoli's critique is a rich and scathing description that covers both actual sound ("carefully modulated" voices), as well as socio-economic class ("unspoken knowledge of good wine and *The New York Times Book Review*"). Indeed, in his article, Montopoli proceeds to connect NPR's broadcasting—and especially its voices—to its audience-building techniques, and it is clear that he is most intent on lampooning its audience.<sup>28</sup>

It is striking that Montopoli's description of "the Voice" directly contradicts Phillips' early description of Stamberg as host of *ATC*. This disparity suggests the complexity of describing the "sonic norms" of NPR's voices at any given time. The sonic reality is muddy, and rife with exceptions. One perplexing contradiction pervades critiques of NPR's voices: NPR somehow retained its reputation as a home for "quirky" voices even as it built and sustained criticisms for its polished, uniform "Voice." In small part, this may simply stem from (often fortuitous) confusion over the sources of public radio programming: NPR is not responsible for many popular public-radio shows featuring hosts with distinctive voices, including Garrison Keillor's *A Prairie Home Companion* and *Marketplace* (both Public Radio International products).<sup>29</sup> Competitors distributing riskier programming have helped to construct a "public radio" sound that has too often been solely attributed to NPR.

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<sup>27</sup> Brian Montopoli, "All Things Considerate: How NPR Makes Tavis Smiley Sound Like Linda Wertheimer," *Washington Monthly* (January/February 2003): 40.

<sup>28</sup> Montopoli takes pains to position Public Radio International as NPR's "younger, smaller, more risk-taking rival," where "hip cultural programming" is still possible (41).

<sup>29</sup> Frank Mankiewicz apparently realized that even though NPR had turned down *A Prairie Home Companion*, it would often receive credit for its broadcast. Of NPR's loss, he noted "rather slyly, that it doesn't really matter anyway, because most listeners think *A Prairie Home Companion* is an NPR program." See John Ydstie, "*A Prairie Home Companion* Goes National—But not on NPR," in *This is NPR: The First Forty Years*, 102. Even Susan J. Douglas's central text on the cultural practices of listening to radio includes a section that erroneously describes *A*

Even as the institution prided itself on welcoming voices that were unusual to radio and reflected local diversity, in the very early 1980s, some public radio stations began to see NPR as a centralized, controlling power that was dictating their programming and erasing their local style. This is evident in the tension between Boston's WGBH-FM listeners and NPR over the introduction of *Morning Edition* and hourly NPR news updates in 1980.<sup>30</sup> The time slot that would receive the news feed was then the domain of Robert J. Lurtsema, who hosted a unique classical music show called *Morning Pro Musica* with his own news reporting and interpretation. The show was odd in a radio context because of Lurtsema's characteristic and sometimes very long pauses during speaking, his regular inclusion of recorded bird song, and the show's overall length (five hours on weekdays) and slow pacing. An article in the *Boston Globe* reported on the intrusion of *Morning Edition* into Lurtsema's time slot:

His fans have been incensed, properly so. Instead of Lurtsema, they're hearing voices with as much character as a can of floor wax, and a delivery that resembles the rotary motions of the floor-waxer efficiently humming over a tract of linoleum. In short, the replacements are highly "professional."<sup>31</sup>

In this case, "professional" was clearly not a compliment. After NPR agreed to distribute (but not produce) Lurtsema's show *Pro Musica* nationally using their new, state-of-the-art satellite (WESTAR), those who did *not* like Lurtsema's style took the time to contact Mankiewicz (then president of NPR) directly, resulting in annoyed letters from Mankiewicz in which he curtly

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*Prairie Home Companion* as "one of NPR's biggest hits." See her *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2004), 324.

<sup>30</sup> See coverage of the conflict in the *Boston Globe*, including Jeff McLaughlin, "The Birds Will Be Back," *Boston Globe* (February 9, 1980); Robert Taylor, "In this Corner; Tuning out Humanity," *Boston Globe* (February 20, 1980); David B. Wilson, "Unwelcome Intruder of the Airwaves," *Boston Globe* (March 3, 1980); and William A. Henry 3rd, "Lurtsema Way Stays," *Boston Globe* (March 4, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, "In this Corner; Tuning out Humanity."

disowned Lurtsema.<sup>32</sup> Yet a headline in the *New York Times* obstinately and inaccurately declared that Lurtsema “May be Offbeat but he’s Standard for National Public Radio,” feeding confusion and adding to the dual characterization of NPR as responsible for “quirky” hosts, even while others lambasted them for their professional, authoritative voices.<sup>33</sup>

The Lurtsema controversy highlights the paradoxical characterizations of NPR voices, and it demonstrates that there is no single model against which to hear Schuller’s hosting voice on *RadioVisions*. In fact, in his role as host of a larger cultural program, Schuller was helping to *construct* an NPR sound. Several descriptions of NPR voices help us hear how Schuller’s hosting voice was imbued with authority on *RadioVisions*.

First, the voices of NPR have often been characterized as professorial, reflecting public radio’s roots in educational radio programs broadcast by land-grant institutions.<sup>34</sup> Mitchell suggests that NPR couldn’t (and didn’t want to) escape the academic world out of which they emerged from educational broadcasting, and that NPR’s goals reflected the values of higher

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<sup>32</sup> One particularly rambling diatribe against Lurtsema and his perceived cohort led Mankiewicz to write dryly to the offended listener, “NPR is not responsible for Mr. Lurtsema, John Cage, Pierre Trudeau, Smith College or Colgate. I don’t even like modern art.” Letter from Mankiewicz to Jack Jones, September 7, 1982. UMD Archives of NPR, Frank Mankiewicz files (hereafter UMD NPR FM), Box 2, Folder 1. In response to another listener, Mankiewicz explained, “*Pro Musica* is not an NPR program and we have no control either over Mr. Lurtsema or who appears in his place and stead ... The decision to use the program or not is entirely up to your local station.” Letter from Mankiewicz to Carl Marsh, July 30, 1982. UMD NPR FM, Box 2, Folder 1.

<sup>33</sup> See Carol McCabe, “He May Be Offbeat But He’s Standard For National Public Radio,” *New York Times* (August 3, 1980). The article asserts, “Whatever else may be said about them, all of NPR’s programs are strikingly different—alternative programming in the current idiom. The case of Mr. Lurtsema is, of course, unique, but it also sheds light on the kind of programming—and public response—that NPR specializes in.”

<sup>34</sup> McCauley writes, “There is no literal connection between educational radio and Justin Morrill’s effort to create land-grant colleges in the Civil War era, but for some observers, America’s pioneer educational stations seemed a natural extension of Morrill’s imperative to expand the reach of a modern university to every corner of its home state.” See McCauley, *NPR*, 13. Mitchell makes a more direct connection to land-grant colleges and NPR’s roots in educational radio, while arguing the NPR’s mission far outpaced that of educational radio. See *Listener Supported*, 48–55.

education.<sup>35</sup> Montopoli derisively cites “the self-reflexive nature of NPR, whose journalists seem to be keenly aware of the way the network is *supposed* to sound—like a knowledgeable, but vaguely condescending college professor.”<sup>36</sup> Yet a “professorial tone” (without condescension) need not be a criticism. “Professorial” describes the actual mode of speaking (clear enunciation with attention to listener understanding), and also the authority of the speaker through education/social position—implying credentials that prompt respect.

Second, an understanding that voice generated *presence* has been central to NPR’s approach to the voice. This characterization has been cultivated by the institution: NPR’s published guide to journalism, authored by Jonathan Kern, proclaims that “Radio is intimate. No matter how big the audience, a good radio host thinks of himself as talking to a single person—the one who’s tuning in—rather than to listeners as a group.”<sup>37</sup> The same NPR guide includes a detailed segment on “sounding conversational,” again emphasizing the idea that voiced language generates presence. Coaching the potential NPR announcer, Kern writes, “each listener feels like you’re talking directly to him or her.”<sup>38</sup> Thus NPR radio voices may convey information, but they are instructed to convey it *to someone*.

Third, according to NPR, a host’s success rested on portraying a persona that would be perceived as authentic and relatable by the audience. Accounts of early hiring decisions reiterate this desire for “authenticity.” Siemering explained: “I said we needed a conversational tone, and

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<sup>35</sup> Mitchell asserts that “Siemering’s statement of purpose would have NPR do a better job doing all the same things educational radio already did, plus tackle a whole new agenda for giving access to ‘real people.’” *Listener Supported*, 56.

<sup>36</sup> Montopoli, “All Things Considerate,” *Washington Monthly* (January/February 2003), 42, quoted in McCauley, *NPR*, 128.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Kern, *Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Susan Stamberg's voice exemplified that. She's authentic. She's the same on as she is off the air."<sup>39</sup> Often, for NPR, the host was responsible for the program's success.<sup>40</sup> NPR's current published broadcasting guide covers ideal hosting voices, showing that similar qualities are still valued: "The public radio audience expects hosts to be honest, credible, versatile, quick-witted, articulate, and indefatigable, at times tough or soothing or whimsical or funny—and always trustworthy."<sup>41</sup> In short, a good host is an individual who provides an identifiable persona. Kern's 2008 guide reflects received wisdom established over NPR's several-decade history (and consistent with its founding purposes), and it encapsulates that history as it strives to preserve a style.

### **Gunther Schuller: A Guest in Your Living Room**

*RadioVisions* was planned with careful attention to the presence of a guiding voice, which was considered especially important because of its broadcast medium and potentially unfamiliar musical substance. During the advisory panel meeting for *RadioVisions*, the panel discussed many aspects of their hosting choice:

In defining the host's role we need to keep in mind the best use of the medium. The host will need to identify the programs as a series for the listener. ... On the subject of having a host at all, it was recognized from a marketing point of view as desirable to have one, although some producers may find it undesirable to use one. Employed properly a host can be a real asset to a program. On the other hand, it is a conventional radio production technique: do we want to use such a traditional device in a series that we hope will be anything but traditional and conventional? The value of a nationally recognized

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<sup>39</sup> Siemerling, quoted in Collins, *National Public Radio*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> When discussing NPR, Steve Rathe shared an anecdote with me about Ira Glass. When Glass's program, *This American Life*, was pitched to NPR, an executive said that it was a great concept and would likely succeed as a show if the host was replaced. The show is now a success in large part *because* of Glass's unique hosting persona. Rathe's comments reflect the importance and subjectivity of determining relatable hosts. Interview with Rathe, May 26, 2009, New York City.

<sup>41</sup> Kern, *Sound Reporting*, 142.

personality as host is difficult to quantify, but it clearly has impact, as well as being a marketing aid (for local station public information officers, etc.) One obvious problem with using the host would be the uncomfortable juxtaposition of the host voice, and, say, a text-sound piece. Admittedly it is risky not to use a host, although a series that is successful *sans* host could be very exciting.<sup>42</sup>

This transcript from the meeting (a shorter version of which was quoted in chapter 2) reveals several central issues that guided the panel's choice for a host. There was a simple need for identification in an aural medium, and the awareness that a host could, ideally, provide "a *presence* which will be a reassuring mediator for the audience."<sup>43</sup> The panel also mentioned the value of a "nationally recognized personality" as a marketing aid. Note also the tension between convention and experiment that informed the panel's deliberations. The mere presence of a host was viewed as a "traditional device"—a device that could potentially conflict with the unconventional musical treatment of voices anticipated in *RadioVisions*. This concern reveals that the concept of "voice" was an influential theme even in the show's planning phase, and that the panel hoped the show would feature unusual treatment of the spoken word. Ultimately, although the panel was open to the possibilities of not using a host, they determined that it would be necessary to have a host.

Schuller was chosen from a long list of possibilities generated at the first *RadioVisions* advisory panel meeting. Table 3.1 lists the advisory panel's ideas, including their notes on who was "especially promising."

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<sup>42</sup> "Summary of First RadioVisions Advisory Panel Meeting," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Italics in original.



**Table 3.1: Possible Hosts for *RadioVisions***<sup>44</sup>

Title of document	“List of Possible Hosts for RadioVisions (serious and otherwise).”
List of hosts	Billy Taylor, Karl Haas, Gunther Schuller*, Martin Bookspan, Woody Allen, Peter Schickele, John Houseman*, Mort Sahl, Steve Allen, Tony Randall, Orson Welles, John Huston, Jane Fonda, Glenda Jackson, George Carlin, Marlon Brando, Leonard Bernstein*, John Cage, John Rockwell, Alexander Scourby, Alastair Cooke, James Earl Jones, Sarah Caldwell, Beverly Sills, and Ken Nordine*+
Notes	Asterisks indicate “especially promising ideas;” + indicates “added by the staff;” Billy Taylor and Karl Hass are marked as “models,” and Steve Allen and Tony Randall are marked as “PBS regulars.”

The brainstormed list of hosts reveals that the issue of authority with the potential audience was important from the outset. Notice that all individuals listed were well-known personalities (to varying degrees), whose fame could confer interest and authority. Many of them carried their own musical authority as performers, conductors, and/or composers (for example, Schickele, Bernstein, Cage, etc). As public figures, individuals on this list would be familiar to listeners, and their authority would rest on the credibility established by their careers.

Rathe described the choice of Schuller in practical terms.<sup>45</sup> Schuller’s participation was also a boon for the panel because his musical knowledge not only added credibility to his hosting voice, but it also allowed him to write his own commentary. He became a larger presence in the show than merely host because he was given his own stock-taking segment that concluded the entire series called “Where Do We Go From Here?” Schuller’s music and conducting career were also featured prominently in the segment “The Composer as Conductor.” His credentials were thus well-established even for the newcomer by his inclusion as a composer/conductor in

<sup>44</sup> “Summary of First *RadioVisions* Advisory Panel Meeting,” UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Rathe.

*RadioVisions*. In other words, if a listener didn't know about his musical reputation elsewhere, they could hear his musical credibility established in the series itself.

An attempt to establish credibility based on résumé was evident in the promotional materials for the *RadioVisions*, revealing an attention to hosting typical of NPR's production processes. Schuller was promoted as a "celebrated composer/conductor" in the press release.<sup>46</sup> When Schuller himself was quoted, vouching for the series as "one of the most significant series dealing with contemporary music ever presented on radio," he was identified as "one of the country's foremost spokesmen for new music."<sup>47</sup> Schuller's biography was also included with the promo materials beginning with the claim: "Gunther Schuller is one of the music world's preeminent personalities."<sup>48</sup> In addition to highlighting his activities as a horn player, conductor, and composer, the biography emphasized his work specifically promoting new music:

From 1963 through 1965, Mr. Schuller organized and conducted "Twentieth Century Innovations," a history-making series of concerts sponsored by the Carnegie Hall Corporation. In 1973, he wrote and hosted "Changing Music," a series devoted to contemporary music which was produced for the Public Broadcasting Service by WGBH Television in Boston.<sup>49</sup>

The sponsorship by the Carnegie Hall Corporation showed that Schuller's musical work had been endorsed by a giant in the classical music world, and that he also had previous experience with public broadcasting.

The target audience for *RadioVisions* was the audience of member stations that primarily broadcast classical music (whether or not those listeners were knowledgeable about music),

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<sup>46</sup> Press Release: "*RadioVisions* Premieres on Public Radio Exploring New Music and Audio Experimentation," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Press Release: Biography for Gunther Schuller. UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

because the producers' vision for the show was (in part) as a supplement to the ostensibly conservative musical fare of classical radio stations. In 1979, the National Endowment for the Arts completed a study and offered a "Report on Contemporary Music Programming by Member Stations of National Public Radio," and this report was included with *RadioVisions* grant materials to the NEA in support of the program's relevance.<sup>50</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, the first segment of *RadioVisions* ("The Challenge") further set up classical music stations as the context for hearing *RadioVisions*.<sup>51</sup> It is within this context that Schuller's credentials would earn the most mileage.

In a letter to Schuller, Rathe indicated in detail what he hoped the host would provide. I quote it at length to demonstrate the extensive and influential role of the host:

Within this collection (this handful of the "musics of our time") I know that individual programs will reverberate off the others. It is largely this reverberation of sounds, themes, textures and ideas which I hope will provide the basis of your contribution.

It is with that in mind, that we have not yet set an order for the programs to be broadcast. ... This flexibility in order of presentation should allow us to use these reflective and connected elements in each program, enhanced by your own comments, to make the collection more than the sum of its parts.

Your own comments on the musics in the program we have just heard, as well as those which we will hear in the following show will appear in the 2 ½ to 3 ½ minutes following the production. Although this may (particularly in those shows requiring 30 seconds of credits) seem like a short time, I believe it should be sufficient for at least a few thought provoking comments; and that by the imposition of this discipline and brevity we can speak to and hold the broad general audience we expect to have listening. My own current notion is that these comments should be spoken in a purposeful but casual way, as they might if each of our listeners was lucky enough to have Gunther Schuller there in the car or living room or kitchen during the broadcast.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Katherine Hay, "Report on Contemporary Music Programming by Member Stations of National Public Radio," May 15, 1979, UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

<sup>51</sup> Rathe has argued that NPR's news and information listeners were more likely to be interested in new music programming such as *RadioVisions*, and that presenting it to classical musical listeners may not have been the most receptive audience. Interview with Rathe.

<sup>52</sup> Steve Rathe, "Letter to Gunther Schuller," March 9, 1981, UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, pp 1–2.

Notice that Schuller's guiding role extended to determining an order for the programs. He was asked specifically to connect the programs in order to provide an historical narrative. Rathe emphasized the ideal brevity of Schuller's commentary so as not overwhelm the listener. Finally, Schuller was coached on *how* to speak, and this portion of the letter reads like it could be an excerpt from NPR's broadcasting guide. Rathe explained that Schuller's speaking mode should be both purposeful and casual. Most importantly, Schuller's voice should generate a presence for the listener—he would be a casual but expert guide present as they listened in their cars, kitchens, or living rooms.

Schuller delivered on Rathe's ideal. In his commentary for *RadioVisions*, he could be heard enunciating clearly and reading from a prepared text. He refrained from pauses or awkward insertions such as “um” or “ah,” yielding a polished and confident effect. Yet the prepared text was slightly colloquial, with sentence structures that sounded like spoken, rather than written language. This added a dose of spontaneity and by extension “authenticity” to his musings. His baritone voice was pleasant and not overly projected, revealing his comfort at the microphone and presumably his confidence in speaking to an audience (similar to the mode of a pre-concert chat). He spoke at a conversational volume, reinforcing a sense of presence. The carefully performed, “proper,” and professorial aspects of Schuller's vocal performance on *RadioVisions* negated the potential for his voice to be mixed up with the collage/text sound of the show's featured music.

Schuller's baritone voice was also sonically marked and culturally recognizable as male. As noted above, NPR had intentionally incorporated female voices since their founding, yet this was far from the norm in broadcasting (even in public broadcasting). In 1993, Collins wrote about the still exceptional nature of NPR's female journalists, Linda Wertheimer, Cokie Roberts,

and Nina Totenberg: “The very fact that reporters still single out NPR because it has so many women in top jobs underscores the sexist nature of journalism...If the three most powerful correspondents at the network were men, there wouldn’t be any story.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the authority of Schuller’s male voice could be heard as typical in the context of musical leadership—and especially in the stereotypically male roles of composer and conductor.<sup>54</sup> While women had made considerable strides in the musical world of the 1960s and 1970s, the roles of composer and conductor were still all too often gendered male. There is no indication in the archival record that Schuller’s gender was a conscious consideration for either Rathe or the Advisory Panel, and the panel’s list of possibilities had included several women (see Table 3.1). *RadioVisions* featured an impressively large number of female composers (though not conductors), and my analysis here is geared toward understanding the cultural valence and authority of Schuller’s hosting voice during his performance on *RadioVisions*, rather than serving as a critique of the producers’ choice. Schuller’s baritone voice conveyed authority—both musical and broadcasting—in part because its sound projected the male gender often associated with leadership positions in those fields.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Collins, *National Public Radio*, 128–9.

<sup>54</sup> See articles on this in the popular press, including Roberta Hershenson, “Female Composers Seeking Parity,” *New York Times* (November 1, 1987); [author unlisted] “Despite Gains for Women, Big-budget Orchestras still Favor Men” *Orange County Register* (August 26, 1990); and Tim Page, “Where Is the Ms. in Maestro?: Major Orchestras Still Shy Away From Female Conductors,” *The Washington Post* (July 19, 2005). See also Tracy McMullen, “Corpo-Realities: Keepin’ It Real in ‘Music and Embodiment’ Scholarship,” *Current Musicology* 82 (Fall 2006): 61–80.

<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, Laurie Anderson has labeled one of her “male personae” the “voice of authority,” specifically attaching it to technology: “In addition to being male, it is also technological. It passes through systems: radio, TV, the phone, a loud p.a.” Anderson, *Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective 1972–1992* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 150. See also discussion of Anderson’s “voice of authority” in Lisa R. Coons, *Gender, Identity and the Voice in the Music of the Composer/Performer with Compositions: “Cythere (a trauma ballet in two parts)” and “Cross-sections: Four Pieces for Electric Guitar Quartet”* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 2011), 57–60.

Heard within the paradoxical generalizations about NPR's announcing style—both as unusual/marked and authoritatively professional—Schuller's style leaned toward and helped construct the authoritatively professional stereotype. Schuller's voice conformed to the NPR ideal of a "host" outlined in its broadcasting guides, and gained authority by its attachment to Schuller's career, its modulated male tone, and his ability to speak clearly and gently. This authority was based on Schuller's credentials, as well as his performing/composing mind and body. His polished yet colloquial vocal performance and professorial tone was perfect for *RadioVisions*; as the advisory panel mentioned, the show would have many "quirky" voices due to its emphasis on text-sound composition, and they would provide immediate contrast to Schuller's performance. I turn now to several unusual presentations of voices in *RadioVisions*.

### **A Portrait of the Composer through Voice in "Shoptalk"**

"Shoptalk" was the fifth program in the *RadioVisions* series, produced and composed by Peter Gordon.<sup>56</sup> When "Shoptalk" was composed, Gordon was living in New York City and he had recently co-founded (with David Van Tieghem) the Love of Life Orchestra (1977). Several of the members of this art-rock group were featured in Shoptalk, including Rik Albani, Peter Zummo, Rhys Chatham, Randy Gun, and Van Tieghem. *RadioVisions*'s promotional materials billed Gordon as "a New York musician and radio producer," as well as a "reed and keyboard specialist."<sup>57</sup> "Shoptalk" was composed and assembled specifically for *RadioVisions*. Its function as a self-contained radio composition was reflected in the NPR's cue sheet for "Shoptalk" (see Table 3.2). Whereas other programs on *RadioVisions* were filled with representative clips of

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<sup>56</sup> Recording housed at the Library of Congress as RGA 7284, NPR program number 811025.

<sup>57</sup> Press Release: "'Shoptalk' Paints Audio Texture of the Musician's Creative World," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123, p. 3.

music and ambient sounds from many sources (see, for example, Tables 3.3 and 3.4), Gordon’s “Shoptalk” was listed as a whole entity, devised entirely for *RadioVisions* with label rights retained by Gordon through Lolo Music Publishing. Also included was Gordon’s “Foreign Waters,” an electronic piece that would be published on the compilation album “Just Another Asshole #5” in 1981.<sup>58</sup> With the exception of Schuller’s few minutes of commentary at the program’s start, this episode of *RadioVisions* served as a broadcast musical premiere.

**Table 3.2: “Shoptalk,” Music Cue Sheet, NPR** <sup>59</sup>

Title of Composition	Timing	Composer/Arranger	Record Label/Publisher	Performers
Shoptalk	50:00	Peter Gordon	Lolo Music Publishing	Peter Gordon Ned Sublette Chris Berg Randy Gunn Rhys Chatham Glenn Branca Rik Albani Peter Zummo David Van Tieghem
Foreign Waters	6:00	Peter Gordon	Lolo Music Publishing	Peter Gordon

“Shoptalk” began with a trumpeter playing a slow jazz standard accompanied by the sound of passing cars and a throat clearing. It sounded as if the trumpeter was busking on a New York City street. This same trumpeting reappeared occasionally to punctuate and organize the hour-long program that followed.

The busker’s music faded gently into the theme song for *RadioVisions*, and Schuller’s voice announced clearly and calmly:

<sup>58</sup> The LP anthology was closely related to a previous magazine issue by the same name (“Just Another Asshole” #6); an important collection of writing on no wave art edited with Glenn Branca. See Robert Siegle, “Writing Downtown,” in *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene, 1974–1984*, ed Marvin J. Taylor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 142.

<sup>59</sup> “Music Cue Sheet,” UMD NPR, Office of the General Counsel Files (hereafter UMD NPR GCF), Series 6, Box 7, Folder 9.

Peter Gordon is a musician and composer who lives in New York City. He recently invited eight of his friends—one at a time—to his home to talk about their lives, and play a bit on their instruments. The friends included Peter Zummo, Rhys Chatham, Ned Sublette, Rick Albani, Randy Gunn, David Van Tieghem, Chris Berg, and Glenn Branca. They are all musicians and composers born in the post-war baby boom, who began their careers in the seventies. The music that they play is quite varied. At Gordon's home, they chatted and listened to records for awhile before Peter started the tape recorder, asking each of them the same set of questions. Their answers, their musics, and the sounds of the city surrounding them are the elements from which Peter Gordon produced "Shoptalk."

Schuller's commentary sounded as though it was introducing a documentary. He described the activity that created the piece (chatting and listening to records and talking at Gordon's home), the music of the composers (simply stating that it is quite varied), and the composers' careers (beginning in the seventies). He then explained that their taped conversations and the musics and sounds of New York City constructed "Shoptalk," priming the listener for an informative audio tour. Schuller reinforced the location and its musical role ("the sounds of the city") as central to the composition. Yet Schuller's mention of the composers' names was the only time the listener would hear any identification for the speakers. After this brief introduction, Schuller's narration disappeared, and the listener was left for the better part of an hour with only the sounds of Gordon's collage, including the unidentified spoken voices of Gordon and his eight musician friends.

Gordon may have mimicked a documentary style, but the show was not really informative/educational in a typical manner. The voices that comprised the textual material of the piece were never identified individually, and at times they were superimposed upon each other so that the anecdotes they told became unintelligible. The voices were also subjected to reverb and heavy editing. Sometimes it was possible to deduce that a voice was answering a specific question, presumably posed by Gordon, but at other times the listener heard only Gordon's questions with no answers. In fact, even when questions and answers were heard in



close temporal proximity, it was not clear whether the two originally had corresponded in the interview. Thus questions and answers were malleable, moveable, and there was no defining narrative that structured the piece.

Instead of being strung together through a narrative logic, the fragments of speech, ambient and electronic sounds were linked by a persistent rhythmic pattern. It continued incessantly, adding continuity but not direction. Listeners heard a driving eighth-note pulse on a sampled high-hat cymbal in a march-like tempo, punctuated by short, pitched electronic sounds implying a downbeat to organize the high-hat eighths. The composite pattern is transcribed as Example 3.1. The pattern was most often organized into groups of four quarters, but occasionally the synthesized pitches would imply a meter change.

### Example 3.1: Rhythmic Ostinato for “Shoptalk”

The musical notation for Example 3.1 consists of two staves. The top staff, labeled "synthesized pitches moving chromatically", shows a sequence of eighth notes with stems pointing down, moving chromatically across four measures. The bottom staff, labeled "high hat eighths", shows a continuous eighth-note pulse represented by "x" marks on a single line, also across four measures. Both staves are in 4/4 time, indicated by a "4" over a "4" in a circle at the beginning of each staff.

While this ostinato occasionally disappeared from the fabric of the piece, it was present for the bulk of the time, acting as a ticking reminder of the passing of time (an ironic reminder, given Gordon’s disregard for temporal realism in the interview snippets).

Schuller’s introduction to “Shoptalk” implied that there would be an introduction to each composer’s music, yet the recognizably musical elements (pitches and melodies) were woven seamlessly into the ambient street sounds and interviews such that no identifiable sounds could

be isolated as representative of the individuals interviewed. At the heart of the composition were almost four seconds of “silence,” where the synthesized music and voices gave way to only ambient sounds. Midway through the piece, and after the “silence” of ambient sounds, the composers’ discussion turned to odder topics. They opined on poor nutrition, girls with short hair, music as boring, the hazards of second hand smoke, and insanity. Approximately thirty-six minutes into the piece, the busking trumpeter began to play for a longer amount of time, suggesting a reprise or recapitulation. Then, at 37:20 a voice reflexively said, with an audible smile, “But I’m just going on. Why don’t you ask me something else?” Humor certainly had a place in Gordon’s composition, especially as he arranged questions and answers that may not have been paired in the interview. At one point, Gordon asked, “What diseases do you think musicians are most prone to?” One of his guests explained, “It depends on how much they practice, I suppose.”

The snippets of conversation were not unlike interviewed voices of public radio. They were confessional, unpolished, stumbling, sometimes rushing ahead, marked by sonic indicators of experience and memory such as pauses and “hmmms.” But rather than being put together for the purpose of conveying specific experiences and information, they were juxtaposed by theme, and at times whimsically so. The voices offered fractured information that posed as an interview gone awry—a parody where multiple voices constructed an imagined musical identity. At times, it was difficult to hear the language, and listeners were left with only the material of the men’s voices (especially from 26:50 to 36:22).

At the conclusion of “Shoptalk,” Schuller announced and explained:

Shoptalk: a sound and word composition composed by Peter Gordon and developed out of a mosaic of conversations and city sounds and some of the music these young people

played and liked and found worth talking about. The program could also have been called theme and variations on the minutia of musicians' shoptalk.<sup>60</sup>

Schuller's voice was immediately contrasted with a soothing, female voice that announced, "this is NPR—National, Public, Radio" at the end of the broadcast. This jarring marker reinforced the extent to which the sound of "Shoptalk" was noticeably out of context as an "NPR" product. And in the context of NPR's attention to information as a mainstay of their national sound, "Shoptalk" was a radical break from the normal NPR fare offered on public stations. Even among its *RadioVisions* counterparts, "Shoptalk" was one of the episodes with the least orienting information and traditional musical expression. Because of its unconventional vocal content, there was little risk of Schuller's voice being confused with the voices in the piece.

"Shoptalk" succeeded in providing a portrait; but of a generalized identity. It served as a portrait of an abstracted "urban composer of new music." And the piece had much to reveal about what was important about that "new music." The promotional materials suggested that "because the collective experiences of these musicians range from the prestigious New Music America concerts to commercials with rock and roll's 'Blondie,' they represent no musical trend of their own."<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, this eclecticism was a defining aspect of the new musical activities of downtown New York City. As Bernard Gendron has argued, in the 1970s and 1980s, cross-pollination in downtown New York City between post-Cagian experimental music, punk, new wave, and loft jazz was an important part of much new musical activity.<sup>62</sup> New negotiations between "high" and "low" culture (such as that suggested by the combinations of "New Music

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<sup>60</sup> Transcribed from "Shoptalk."

<sup>61</sup> "'Shoptalk' Paints Audio Texture of the Musician's Creative World," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

<sup>62</sup> See Bernard Gendron, "The Downtown Music Scene," in *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974–1984*, ed. Marvin Taylor (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 41–65.

America series and rock and roll's 'Blondie'" in the press release) also characterized downtown musical experimentalism.<sup>63</sup> The composers' comments in "Shoptalk" were loaded with references to pop music/pop culture, including Led Zeppelin and The Temptations. Several composers counted electric guitar as one of their main instruments. The composers cited popular radio and television programs as a formative part of their experience growing up. They also reminisced about Mary Martin performing in *Peter Pan*, Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat*, and Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* as their varied musical influences. Contrary to the claim that these influences resisted categories, this type of diverse musical influence was important for understanding the new experimental music of downtown New York.

The voices of "Shoptalk" invoked an "authentic" and spontaneous artistry, inspiration, and creativity as they spoke of being composer/performers. The construction was partially a typical, romantic construction of "the composer," yet in "Shoptalk" these concepts were subversively revised for 1980s downtown New York.<sup>64</sup> Inspiration/creativity/artistry remained important—but its sources were modified to include popular music, experiences of mass-mediated culture (such as television and radio) available growing up in the U.S., and the mundane (including boredom and physical ailments). The composer portrayed in "Shoptalk" was markedly a product of the U.S.—the piece was littered with references to places in the States, as well as the U.S. music education system (even the common practice of playing the recorder in elementary school). The *RadioVisions* publicity materials also used "Shoptalk" to generalize about a general artistic milieu in downtown New York City, identifying the piece as an "Audio

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<sup>63</sup> See Gendron, *Between Montmartre & The Mudd Club*, 227–316.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Nicholas Cook's critique of the Romantic construct of the artist in his *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19–38.

Texture of the Musician's Creative World."<sup>65</sup> While "the musician" of the title was Gordon, the press release moved away from specific identity:

Gordon's "sound and word" composition presents a detailed audio picture of artistic creative life. The portrait evolves from what seems at first to be merely random snips of conversation, music and street noise. But through those sonic layers listeners discover a unique culture shared by the lower Manhattan community in which many new-music composers live and work. It's a fragmented world, described by composers' music and voices, the laughter of children playing, the roar of machinery, popular music, television, and the echoes of loft studios.<sup>66</sup>

Thus Gordon's composition constructed a version of new music composition in the context of his social circle.

"Shoptalk" concluded with an announcement linking it to the next week's broadcast, "Details at Eleven" by Anderson and Giorno. Schuller made the connection between the two pieces by grouping these artists under the rubric "sonic environmentalists." Indeed, both shows ("Shoptalk" and "Details at Eleven") featured environmental sounds from the urban environment of New York City.

### **A Taxi Ride in New York: "Details at Eleven"**

"Details at Eleven" was introduced simply as "a composition for radio by Roma Baran and ZBS media." It alternated between Laurie Anderson's singing and storytelling, Giorno's poetry, and recordings of episodes from the artists' life in New York City: a cab ride, a trip to the post office, eating at a diner or sandwich shop, talking to an exterminator. Unlike Gordon's "Shoptalk," which was presented as a single piece, "Details at Eleven" was episodic, featuring a medley of shorter works. Excerpts of pieces by Anderson and Giorno were linked by the refrain

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<sup>65</sup> "'Shoptalk' Paints Audio Texture of the Musician's Creative World," UMD NPR Unprocessed, Box 123.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

of ambient recordings. Three pieces by each artist were included in “Details at Eleven.” Table 3.3 lists the titles and record labels for each piece.

**Table 3.3: “Details at Eleven,” Music Cue Sheet, NPR<sup>67</sup>**

Title of Composition	Timing	Composer/Arranger	Record Label/Publisher
O Superman	8:23	Laurie Anderson	110 Records
Language of the Future	7:18	Laurie Anderson	Copyright 1978 Laurie Anderson
Walk the Dog	5:54	Laurie Anderson	110 Records
I Resigned Myself to Being Here	9:44	John Giorno	Giorno Poetry Systems Records
Put Your Ear to Stone and Open Your Heart to the Sky	5:45	John Giorno	Giorno Poetry Systems Records
Completely Attached to Delusion	7:56	John Giorno	Giorno Poetry Systems Records

Also scribbled on the cue sheet were identifying phrases for the ambient sounds between each piece, including “Laurie Anderson in taxi,” “Anderson in post office,” “John Giorno in restaurant,” “John Giorno in subway,” and “Giorno in coffee shop.”<sup>68</sup>

Producer Baran’s structure for “Details at Eleven” alternated starkly between the “performed” and the “natural.” In Anderson’s excerpts, her often heavily manipulated voice was an integrated part of her songs, sounding variously like chanting, lilting lyrics, singing, or storytelling. Giorno’s recordings were characterized by passionate and deliberate performance. The excerpts featured his own phasing technique which was developed using electronic tape.<sup>69</sup> Both artists’ pieces were polished and produced. In contrast, the “audio vignettes” (as they were billed in the *RadioVisions* promotional materials) sounded raw. They included a richness of

<sup>67</sup> “Music Cue Sheet,” UMD NPR GCF, Series 6, Box 7, Folder 10.

<sup>68</sup> “Music Cue Sheet” for “Details at Eleven,” UMD NPR GCF, Series 6, Box 7, Folder 10.

<sup>69</sup> See Giorno’s comments on the possibilities of “layers of sound” using tape in Nicholas Zurbrugg and John Giorno, “Poetry, Entertainment, and the Mass Media: An Interview with John Giorno,” *Chicago Review* 40(2/3) (1994): 85.

ambient sound that often obscured the speaking voices. The speech included in these episodes was generally not projected toward the recording device—as if the listener were eavesdropping on events in the artists’ everyday lives.

Both Anderson and Giorno embraced technologically enhanced voices in their musical/poetic numbers. Anderson has cultivated an androgynous performing persona, and occasionally used the vocoder to go a step farther and sonically wear a “man’s voice.”<sup>70</sup> Giorno, who has preferred the label “poet” to describe his work, could also be characterized as a performance artist or text-sound composer. He has used recording technology regularly in his poetry, often focusing on found sound and found poetry. Giorno’s many collaborations extended to the music world, especially in the late 1970s (including work with Laurie Anderson, Glenn Branca, and David van Tieghem).<sup>71</sup>

Giorno’s “I Resigned Myself to Being Here” used his phasing technique to augment but not obscure his text. This was not an electronic process that played out over the course of the piece (such as that used by Reich in his tape pieces such as *Come Out*); rather, Giorno used it for specific, relatively short phrases and altered the speed at which the voices “pulled apart.” His careful use of phasing of made his voice into a crowd of passionate yet expressively unified poets, and impressively retained the intelligibility of the text. “I Resigned Myself to Being Here” meandered through the topics drug use, sexual encounters, and the artistic developments in New York City in the 1970s. The palpable enthusiasm expressed in Giorno’s delivery—which alternated between shouting and whispering—was multiplied through his use of phasing and

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<sup>70</sup> See Susan McClary’s discussion in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002 [1991]), 137, and Lisa R. Coons, *Gender, Identity and the Voice*, especially chapter 1 (pp. 42–65).

<sup>71</sup> Zurbrugg and Giorno, “Poetry, Entertainment, and the Mass Media,” 83–101.

reverb. This was not a juxtaposition between the mechanical and the natural; Giorno's natural expression was augmented through the mechanical process of phasing. This smooth use of voice-altering technology was also evident in Anderson's pieces in "Details at Eleven."

Anderson's second full piece featured in "Details at Eleven," "Language of the Future," relied on vocoder technology to assume what sounded like a male voice. "Language of the Future" told of an encounter with a young girl who spoke "computerese." Anderson crooned (in her male voice):

everything was circuitry, electronics, digital  
it was the language of sounds, of signals, of switching  
it was the language of the rabbit, of caribou, of the penguin, of the beaver  
a language of the past; current runs through bodies, and then it doesn't  
on again, off again, one thing instantly replaces another  
it was a language of the future.<sup>72</sup>

In this piece, technological concepts were woven together with natural concepts. The language of technology was also the language of the animals, and Anderson pointed out that a "current runs through bodies." Through her lyrics and her performance, Anderson questioned what was considered "natural" and "authentic" for voices, and she actively thwarted the binary of nature/technology by fusing the two concepts and describing the language of the future as simultaneously natural and digital.

McClary has pointed out Anderson's unique approach to the nature vs. technology binary, and argued that Anderson was *not* simply describing the "alienating influence of the media on human authenticity" in her work: "to interpret her work in terms of that standard

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<sup>72</sup> Language of the Future, transcribed from *RadioVisions* "Details at Eleven." A similar but slightly different version of the story is printed in Anderson, "Americans on the Move," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 48.



dichotomy is to ignore her obvious fascination with gadgetry.”<sup>73</sup> McClary positioned this mediated performance in relation to Anderson’s performing body:

...in Laurie Anderson’s performances, one actually gets to watch her produce the sounds we hear. But her presence is always already multiply mediated: we hear her voice only as it is filtered through Vocoders, as it passes through reiterative loops, as it is layered upon itself by means of sequencers.<sup>74</sup>

For McClary, this embodied presence was essential because it was a feminine presence. Yet in *RadioVisions*, especially for listeners who may have been unfamiliar with Anderson’s other work, the visual anchor of a female body was lost. Anderson’s voice was free to sonically explore variously gendered and technologically mediated expressions without the tether of the (gendered and stereotypically “natural”) visual body.

Baran’s overall structure for “Details at Eleven” starkly alternated sections of found “audio vignettes” and composed pieces. The contrast between Giorno’s and Anderson’s pieces and the clips of daily life in New York nicely divided the episode, and emphasized the creative world in which the artists worked similarly to Gordon’s use of ambient sound in “Shoptalk.” Unlike “Shoptalk,” however, the ambient sound never mingled with the sounds of Giorno’s and Anderson’s music in an integrated way. In “Shoptalk,” the city was part of the music; in “Details at Eleven,” the city was the backdrop for the music. In this function, the “audio vignettes” slightly resembled the ambient “actualities” that punctuate audio journalism. Yet even with this tenuous connection through the “audio vignettes,” “Details at Eleven” had no recognizable NPR prototype. It was unlike an interview, and its discrete performances were not introduced in a manner typical of classical selections on public radio stations.

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<sup>73</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 137. See also Phillip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 137.

Of this trio of shows on the voice, “Details at Eleven” was the least concerned with historical narrative. Schuller presented it with almost no commentary (except mentioning the importance of words and calling the composers “sonic environmentalists”)—certainly much less information than he had offered for other segments. The segment producer and artists themselves made no commentary, using the documentary portions of the episode only to capture everyday sounds and record their urban environment and interactions. And Schuller’s closing comments were almost entirely devoted to the upcoming episode rather than to the episode at hand.

“Details at Eleven” offered a contrasting approach to the voice when compared to “Shoptalk.” Giorno and Anderson did not present the spontaneity and immediacy reflected in the odd interview parody of “Shoptalk;” rather, their voices were carefully performed and modulated. Their performances presented artistically arranged and technologically mediated use of language to explore theatrical story telling, poetic language, gendered expression, and the musicality of speech. While “Shoptalk” focused on everyday experiences through the comments of the included artists as the fabric of the piece, “Details at Eleven” cordoned off the spontaneous speaking in “audio vignettes.” “Shoptalk” used voices to construct an intimate and confessional portrait of the composer; however, “Details at Eleven” used the voice as an instrument for performance. It is perhaps this last aspect that connected the episode most clearly to the one that would follow: “The Oldest Instrument.” In “Details at Eleven,” Anderson’s and Giorno’s performances portrayed the possibilities of the voice as (among other things) technologically enhanced utterance of the future. La Barbara—though also focusing on the voice as instrument—would take exactly the opposite stance in the next episode. In “The Oldest Voice,” the voice was presented as an utterly human, natural, and even primal expression.

### “From the First Grunts and Cries”

The historiographic project put forth in “The Oldest Instrument” was initiated during the last few minutes of “Details at Eleven,” when Schuller explained the foundational concepts for the next week’s show:

We have now had two programs on the spoken or sung word in which the emphasis was on words, either metamorphosed into musical compositions, or integrated with music, as Laurie Anderson and John Giorno have done so fetchingly in their work. Now in our next program on *RadioVisions* we will turn our attention to the voice itself, that oldest of instruments. From the first grunts and cries of the prehistoric human animal, to the vocal usages of today, the voice has been our most intimate instrument, constantly ready for instantaneous use.<sup>75</sup>

Schuller’s commentary for “The Oldest Instrument” was discussed in chapter 2. Here, I turn to La Barbara’s narration and her construction of vocal authenticity. She served as the host for the segment, which was an audio seminar on the voice in new music. In this respect, La Barbara sounded like an NPR host, explaining and demonstrating as a guide. The listener never had to wait long before someone identified the sounds heard, thus the listener could be in the know throughout the program.

La Barbara’s narrative was supported with musical examples from many sources. Table 3.4 gives a complete list of the music that was included, along with the length of time it was played. The table also lists whether that example was considered “performance” or “background” music within the program. This designation of “performance vs. background” music had been irrelevant for “Shoptalk” and “Details at Eleven,” revealing another key difference from “The Oldest Instrument.”

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<sup>75</sup> Transcribed from “Details at Eleven.”

**Table 3.4: “The Oldest Instrument,” Music Cue Sheet, NPR<sup>76</sup>**

<b>Title of Music</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Performer</b>	<b>Time Played</b>
La donna e mobile from <i>Rigoletto</i>	Verdi	background	RCA ARMI-0278 Side A, cut 3	Enrico Caruso	:15
Gregorian Chant	Verdi [sic]	background	ABC Classics AB 67025 Side B, cut 4	Capella antiqua München-Choralschola	:15
Flight of the Bumble Bee	Rimsky-Korsakov	background	Moss Music Group MMG 1125 Side 1, cut 1	Swingle Sisters	:15
Tibetan Buddhism		background	Nonesuch H 72071 Side 1, cut 2	The Ritual Orchestra and Chants	:15
Sing Ye Merrily	Mendelssohn	background	RPC-CDLP-9 Side 2, cut 1	Concordia Choir	:15
Robbins Nest	Thompson/Jacquet	background	New World NW 295 Side 1, cut 7	Ella Fitzgerald	:15
Exsultate, jubilate [sic] (final “Alleluia”)	Mozart	background	Phillips 6500 006 Side 1, cut 1 (end)	Elly Ameling-soprano, English Chamber Orch, Raymond Leppard	:15
RadioVisions signature music	John Ramo, Zenon Slawinski	Theme	Oris tape	Composers	:32
Just	Charles Amirkhanian	Performance	American Text Sound Pieces (1750 Arch)		3:00
Heavy Breathing	Charles Amirkhanian	Performance	Ibid.		1:39
It’s Gonna Rain	Steve Reich	Performance	Live/Electric Music Col. MS 7265		2:30
Fine and Mellow	Fitzgerald	Performance and Background	Pablo 2310829	Ella Fitzgerald	:30
Voice Piece	Joan La Barbara	Performance	Wizard 2266	Joan La Barbara	2:45
Charlie Rutledge	Charles Ives	Performance	Am. Scenes/Am. Mus. Col. M30229	Thomas Stewart	2:38
Is Anybody Home?	Laurie Anderson	Performance	Airwaves 110 Records	Laurie Anderson	4:12
Rally	Meredith Monk	Performance	Airwaves 110 Records	Meredith Monk, et al.	3:23
Vocal Extensions	Joan La Barbara	Performance and Background	Wizard 2266	Joan La Barbara	1:00

<sup>76</sup> “Music Cue Sheet,” for “The Oldest Instrument,” UMD NPR GCF, Series 6, Box 7, Folder 10.

Ethics is the Aesthetics of the Few-ture	Laurie Anderson	Performance	Airwaves 110 Records	Laurie Anderson	:59
When I am With You and He Destroyed Her Image	Charles Dodge	Performance	Am. Text Sound Pieces (1750 Arch)		3:42
Balinese Monkey Chant	Traditional	Performance and Background	Nonesuch H72064 Tibetan Buddhism		2:00
Hearing Solar Winds	David Hykes	Performance	Tape provided by composer	Harmonic Choir	3:45
Small Pieces for Large Chorus	Earle Brown	Performance	Turnabout 34759		2:33
Jubilus	George Costinesco	Performance	Commissioned and recorded specially for this program		7:45

“The Oldest Instrument” was specifically didactic in nature, and the musical examples guided the listener by illustrating La Barbara’s points.

For the purposes of hearing the authority of the voice constructed in “The Oldest Instrument,” the actual content of La Barbara’s prepared text was essential. In addition to the performed authority lent by La Barbara’s hosting voice (and her ability to demonstrate various vocal techniques for the audience), she *explained* the authority of human voices to her listeners through her historical narrative. This authority was part and parcel of constructing a revisionist history for experimentalism, and new vocal music in particular. Schuller aided the project by introducing the program as follows:

From Enrico Caruso to Frank Sinatra, from Gregorian Chant to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, every era and culture creates its own form of expression with the human voice. In new music, the most innovative branch of contemporary music, the voice, the oldest instrument, is a focus of interest and experimentation. Today’s program will chart some of the explorations composers are making in vocal music, giving us some new definitions of the word singing. Your host for today’s program is not only an expert on new music,

writing a regular column on the subject in *Musical America*, but is also herself a singer and composer of new vocal music: Joan La Barbara.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to establishing the ubiquity of the voice, and advertising the newness of what the listener would hear, Schuller included La Barbara's credentials for hosting.

La Barbara's own introduction to the segment established the primacy of the voice by linking it to human biology and even prehistoric beginnings:

The human voice. It's probably the first sound we hear, and definitely the first sound we use. From our first howl as an infant, we continue experimenting with the vast possibilities of the voice. It's our first means of expression. We can call it the original instrument because mankind grunted, sang, chanted, and verbalized, *long* before the first primitive string, woodwind, or percussion instruments were fashioned. We experiment as children with the vast capabilities of the voice, freely, without inhibitions, squealing, shrieking, trying new sounds. As we grow older we tend to civilize out some of the strange, interesting, peculiar qualities of the voice. We concentrate on speech. In music we concentrate on melodies. In today's new music, many composers, performers and sound artists are attempting to rediscover the voice. Expand the possibilities. But before we go too far with extended techniques, let's start with what is familiar to all of us: the speaking voice. In our culture we tend to make a distinction between speaking and singing. Some composers are trying to break down that distinction, turning speech into music. It's an area called text sound, and Charles Amirkhanian is one of its foremost composer-performers. His composition "Just" explores the layered possibilities of four simple words.<sup>78</sup>

Thus the body was central to the voice's authority. It was set against the "technology" of instruments and the civilizing aspects of language. According to La Barbara, the voice was instinctual, unlearned, and primal. Notice also the constraining role of "civilization," which eliminated the "strange, interesting, peculiar qualities of the voice." "Rediscovering the voice" was identified as one project for composers of new music. She also tasked composers with breaking down the boundary between speaking and singing, or, making speech "musical."

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<sup>77</sup> Schuller, transcribed from "The Oldest Instrument."

<sup>78</sup> La Barbara, transcribed from "The Oldest Instrument."

This concept (merging speaking and singing) led La Barbara to Steve Reich's process of phasing and his piece *It's Gonna Rain*. She explained, "One of our most innovative composers, Steve Reich, used the voice of a street preacher he recorded sermonizing in San Francisco's Union Square in 1965." She continued, emphasizing the idea of "discovery":

While playing identical tape loops of this found sound on two tape recorders, he accidentally discovered the process of phasing, in which the sounds move in and out of unison with each other because the tape recorders didn't run at exactly the same speed. Reich turned this discovery into a musical process and the result is the first in his series of pieces dealing with repeating patterns. *It's Gonna Rain*.<sup>79</sup>

Martin Scherzinger has compellingly linked Reich's phasing to his study of Ghanaian drumming, showing multi-cultural influence that has been frequently masked as "discovery."<sup>80</sup> Yet this trope of "discovery" and even "accident" bolstered the music's characterization as truly *new*, and yet at the same time, a natural process simply waiting for attention.

La Barbara *did* acknowledge the sources for many of these "experiments" (if not Reich's) and these non-European sources were also important for constructing authority. She admitted:

Many of the sounds we refer to as extended or experimental or new vocal techniques actually aren't new at all. They've existed in the musics of other cultures for centuries. Right now we're listening to a Balinese monkey chant where circular singing is part of a ritual of life. From Bali and the monkey chant, we move to Tibet, where the monks have practiced the art of one voice chording for centuries.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> See Martin Scherzinger, "Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic: Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain*," *Current Musicology* 79 & 80 (2005): 207–44, and "'Art' Music in a Cross-Cultural Context: The Case of Africa," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004,) 584–613.

<sup>81</sup> La Barbara, transcribed from "The Oldest Instrument."

That these techniques were “ancient” and “ritual” connected them to the pre-civilized experimentation idealized in the beginning of the programming. La Barbara added, “vocal techniques like these from other cultures have expanded the repertoire of available sounds.”<sup>82</sup>

La Barbara impressively demonstrated the extended techniques that she was illustrating (including even “one voice chording”), lending to the seminar-like quality of the episode. When discussing phasing, La Barbara’s speaking voice was “phased” on air. Likewise, when discussing other extended vocal techniques (such clicks, multi-phonics, scales, circular breathing, different resonance spaces in the head), she was also able to demonstrate these techniques on the spot. Her performing body and ability to actually demonstrate all of these extended vocal techniques added authority to her narrative. Her bodily demonstration was also linked to the embodied construct of the voice presented in her narrative. La Barbara said:

One of my first experiments with the voice was to explore different resonance areas in the head. What makes each of our voices different is our bone structure. You can make more of these bone resonances to emphasize particular timbres, or colors.

This rhetoric emphasized the voice as an individual utterance: a marker of identity based on one’s unique body. She concluded her demonstration/explanation with a smiling affirmation of the broadcast medium’s personal nature: “You’ve just heard some of my internal resonances!”

In her explanations of the music presented, La Barbara retained the voice as fundamentally natural, with technical manipulations added for experiment. Discussing her own piece, *Vocal Extensions*, she said colloquially:

You may be wondering about the sound you’re hearing. The sound source is actually just my voice. The recording is from a work I did in 1975, *Vocal Extensions*. I fed the natural

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<sup>82</sup> As discussed in more detail in chapter 2, this borrowing was common. See, for example, John Corbett, “Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others,” in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 163–186.



vocal sound through some small devices usually used by electric guitarists. The electronics gave me another musical element to work with.

Thus her raw materials were “natural,” even “found” because they originated in the body.

La Barbara’s historical narrative also affirmed “Americaness.” This was accomplished by beginning with prehistoric times, touring the world, and then jumping to the twentieth-century U.S. without any glimpse of Europe. She turned to Ives as a founding father (echoing other programs in *RadioVisions*):

Singing is always being redefined by composers. Charles Ives—one of our foremost composers—helped enlarge our definition of the song setting. ... The cowboy saga of Charlie Rutledge is one musical form of story telling.

From Ives, she moved to three extraordinary female figures in new music (although, humbly, never identified as such): Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, and herself. Here, she emphasized embodied performance, and explained that a cross-pollination between the arts had enriched their styles (music, poetry, video, film). Anderson, Monk, and La Barbara were often grouped together as examples of women succeeding in new music, and they have been often grouped by their vocal performance styles (especially under the gendered rubric of “performance art”).<sup>83</sup> La Barbara did not dwell on this connection in *RadioVisions*.

La Barbara also mused on musical trends that have been central to the notion of “experimentalism.” She credited Earle Brown with expanding notation:

[Brown’s] scores use more than simple flats and sharps on musical staves. His graphic symbols might include squiggly lines, dots, arrows, dashes and so forth. In a sense they’re little pictures that indicate to the performer better than traditional notation what

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<sup>83</sup> For a discussions of performance art and connections between Anderson and Monk, see John Rockwell, “Women Composers, Performance Art, and the Perils of Fashion: Laurie Anderson,” in *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 123–132, esp. p. 129. William Duckworth also groups the two artists together as “performance artists” in *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), 345–388.

the sounds should be. He also created what he calls open form, in which the conductor recreates the piece at each performance by choosing when to play certain sections.<sup>84</sup>

La Barbara's history in "The Oldest Instrument" was revisionist, completely circumventing European history, and even musical history in the U.S. that was not perceived of as truly American. When discussing speech as song, not once did she mention Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, with its influential *Sprechstimme*. Likewise, Babbitt's *Philomel* was absent from the narrative, as were Berio's experiments in speech and song. I do not mean to imply that La Barbara's narrative *should* have been all-encompassing, or fault her for omissions. I would, however, argue that such omissions were strategic, as these composers' music was perceived as influenced by European compositional traditions and/or "academic" by La Barbara. These were key omissions for establishing a *different* point of origin for new American music, and for defining experimentalism in the late twentieth century. La Barbara was working in a climate that valued populism, and was increasingly reacting against the perceived hegemony of serialism, academia, and the European avant-garde. Thus, in spite of Babbitt's credentials as an "American" composer, his music was not the type La Barbara was trying to survey.

"The Oldest Instrument" was actually a revisionist history of the voice for a downtown composer. And La Barbara's work on "The Oldest Instrument" was consistent with her personal exploration of the voice elsewhere.<sup>85</sup> La Barbara did, however, mention another use of the voice—as *an instrument*—that was seldom included in music history texts at the time: scatting. Jazz had been an important influence for La Barbara.<sup>86</sup> As an art often considered "authentically

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<sup>84</sup> La Barbara, transcribed from "The Oldest Instrument."

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, *The Voice is the Original Instrument* (Lovely Music, Ltd., LCD 3003, 2003).

<sup>86</sup> Bernard Gendron, "The Voice as Original Instrument: The Aesthetic of Joan La Barbara," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, October 27, 2008.

American,” it was another important source for establishing national identity, and she played Ella Fitzgerald’s scatting as an example.

In “The Oldest Instrument,” the notion of the “voice” was just as important as the actual sounding voices. This definition of “voice” was embodied, a marker of distinct sonic identity, primal, and natural. These original elements constructed an authority that lent itself to the new music presented. The music was newly experimental, yet rooted deeply in the human experience, inseparable from the body. The hosting speaking voices in “The Oldest Instrument” (Schuller’s and La Barbara’s) conformed to sonic norms of NPR broadcasting, with scripted yet casual speech, an emphasis on presence and personality, and credentialed authority. And the use of the voice in the musical examples traded in unconventionality, yet the quirkiness of these voices was contained and less disorienting because they were mediated by hosting explanations and experts/insiders.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has moved between treating theoretical conceptions of “the voice,” the qualities of specific announcing voices, the narrative of historiographic voices, and voices comprising musical pieces. While I hope to have escaped simplistic conflation of these varying versions of “voice,” it is precisely my argument that rigidly defining “voice” and separating its various aspects would miss the cultural and historical work that this slippery concept did during the broadcast of *RadioVisions*. Three programs of *RadioVisions* carried “the voice” as their topic, and were then comprised of many types of voices, and simultaneously documented a new music scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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The documentation of a new music scene was where one pervasive but un-named “voice” emerged as primary: downtown New York City. Not only did ambient sounds from New York dominate these three segments, but the musicians featured were active in constructing the sound of that area. The trio of shows featured a network of composer/friends, many of whom had worked together. The ideas propped up by the authorities of their “voices” were therefore essential to understanding the artistry of downtown New York. Schuller’s dramatic introduction to this trio of shows asserted the importance of “the voice” in new music. Yet the shows themselves (and especially the historical narratives presented) often reveal the ways that “the voice” was equally important in defining new music. By lending its authorities to the “new music” it makes—whether that authority was embodiment, a performance mode, a post-human technological voice, or non-Western voice—the construct of “voice” in various versions has helped to define musical experimentalism. The trio of shows on the voice in *RadioVisions* further established downtown New York as the epicenter for hearing that experimentalism.

Using downtown New York as a point of origin and using activity there to define other practices was common. Writing about New Music America, and attempting to define “new music,” Iris Brooks explained:

For some, new music is simply new sounds not heard before. In New York—where the New Music America festival began in 1979—the term “new music” had different connotations. It referred to experimental work being done mostly downtown, as opposed to the more academic music found in universities and uptown. The “downtown/uptown” terminology began as geographic references within New York City and later became part of an international vocabulary.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Iris Brooks, “New Music America History: A Caterpillar or a Butterfly?” In *New Music Across America*, ed. Brooks, 1992, 6. See a similar definition by John Rockwell: “By now the distinction between ‘uptown’ and ‘downtown’ new music probably means something even to those who live outside New York, as a distinction between academic sobriety and bohemian experimentation.” “Women Composers, Performance Art, and the Perils of Fashion: Laurie Anderson,” in *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 123.

Brooks also identified some of the key aspects I have highlighted in this trio of *RadioVisions* shows: opposition to academic music, the importance of the vernacular, the incorporation of jazz and “world music,” and the idea that technology and less notation would result in an aural culture. She said:

Atonality and serial techniques were old; minimalism, conceptual, and performance art, and text-sound were considered more cutting edge. The influences and appropriation of elements of vernacular culture were becoming incorporated into new music. ...Boundaries between jazz, world, and new musics began to blur. ... Developments in technology provided instant access to varied sound palettes and allowed music to return to a more aural tradition.<sup>88</sup>

It is my argument that, without ever overtly presenting it, a definition of new music similar to Brooks’s informed and even dominated the “new music” of *RadioVisions*, especially in these three segments. Here, I have looked more specifically at how the definition was constructed, both from the music and the rhetoric surrounding it in these three segments on the voice, and from the actual sonic broadcast voices. I have found that notions of “the voice” have been one way that tropes of multiculturalism, the importance of the everyday (found sound), as well as the importance of sound-altering technology (as in Anderson and Giorno’s work), and the importance of popular culture (also evident in Peter Gordon’s “Shoptalk” and Laurie Anderson’s crossover music).

By exploring the cultural valences and authorities of the musical voices in *RadioVisions*’s “Details at Eleven,” “Shoptalk,” and “The Oldest Instrument,” as well as Schuller’s hosting voice in the context of public radio broadcasting, I have shown the way notions of the voice were essential to the way “experimentalism” was constructed in the series. The tropes invoked by *RadioVisions*’s voices, in addition to Schuller’s commentary, aligned the American experimentalism presented on *RadioVisions* with a broader notion of experimentalism

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<sup>88</sup> Brooks, “New Music America History,” 6.

exemplified by the New Music America festivals and activities in downtown New York City. The voices of *RadioVisions* were also heard in the context of public radio broadcasting, where their valences were slightly different. While Schuller's hosting voice (and La Barbara's in "The Oldest Instrument") conformed to and constructed an NPR sound, the musical voices of these three segments represented a striking departure from the usual voices of NPR. The unconventional voices could signal experimental music *and* experimental radio documentary, even as the hosting voices provided an anchor for listeners. It was within this unique context that the voices of America's "new music" on *RadioVisions* helped to define, construct, and categorize contemporary music making.

## Chapter 4

### VOICES OF IMPROVISATION BROADCAST FOR PUBLIC RADIO: *MARITIME RITES* (1984)<sup>1</sup>

Chapters 2 and 3 focused on *RadioVisions*'s meaning based on its creation and production within the context of NPR's infrastructure. As I turn to *Maritime Rites* (1984) in this chapter, I aim to demonstrate a more subtle way that NPR shaped the development of new music in the 1980s. *Maritime Rites* (1984) was not an NPR program, yet it was funded by the institution's Satellite Program Development Fund. It carried its composer/producer Alvin Curran's and his collaborator Melissa Gould's names instead of NPR's, and its composer retained all rights to the program.<sup>2</sup> Unlike *RadioVisions*, *Maritime Rites* (1984) was offered to NPR-member and non-member stations alike. The piece also differed from *RadioVisions* because it was not specifically designed as a curated survey of new American music. *Maritime Rites* (1984) consisted of ten short broadcasts featuring real-world sounds from the Eastern U.S. coast (foghorns, whistle buoys, waves, and birds), human voices (speaking and singing), and musical improvisations by prominent members of the experimental music community.

Curran and Gould were awarded funding to create *Maritime Rites* (1984) through NPR's Satellite Program Development Fund (SPDF). This fund supported numerous new music programs in the 1980s, including two programs covering the New Music America festivals in

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<sup>1</sup> The title *Maritime Rites* refers to a musical concept, a score for live performance, a broadcast version of the piece, and a CD release of the broadcast version in 2004 (*Maritime Rites*, New World Records, 80625-2). Throughout this chapter, I include the appropriate date or place (as Curran does) with the title for the sake of clarity. If no date or place appears, I am referring to the piece as a general concept.

<sup>2</sup> Gould illustrated the CD booklet and she assisted Curran with recording. I will primarily refer to the piece as Curran's, as he is considered the main composer/producer of the piece as a concept. Gould has been a frequent collaborator of Curran's for sound installation pieces. Other joint projects include *Notes from Underground* (1991) and *Kaboom* (1998).

1981 and 1983, as well as various programs consisting of entirely new compositions.<sup>3</sup> The fund was specifically established both to celebrate the sonic capabilities of the newly acquired WESTAR (the public radio satellite), and to meet the demand for more—and, importantly, more diverse—programming, a demand created by WESTAR’s ability to simultaneously distribute multiple programs over twelve channels.<sup>4</sup> New music offered a rich, artistic presentation of sounds, and programs dedicated to new music could be billed as unusual and under-represented fare within a more diverse collection of satellite offerings.

*Maritime Rites* (1984) was especially suited for public-radio presentation and funding through the SPDF because of its use of documentary sound and its quasi-journalistic presentation of high-profile improvising/composing musicians. The piece’s status as radio art hinged on its creative juxtaposition of voices and identities, represented as instrumental “voices,” recorded interviews, and chanting/singing. In this chapter, I first approach *Maritime Rites* (1984) as piece designed for radio, emphasizing its origins as a live-performance piece, its appeal for public radio, and its route to funding through NPR’s Satellite Program Development Fund (SPDF). Curran was able to win funding in part because (non-commercial) radio broadcast was key to his conception of the piece and because of the piece’s documentary qualities. Next, I argue that the composers included in *Maritime Rites* (1984) were linked as a community through Curran’s conception of musical improvisation, where improvisation was an expression of personal musical voice and identity. Various voices (literal and metaphorical, including excerpts of speech,

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<sup>3</sup> In 1981, the SPDF funded a program called *New Music America*, and in 1983 *New Sounds USA*, both reporting on events and music at New Music America festivals in those years. For more new music programs funded by the SPDF, see Table 4.1 in this chapter. For a complete listing of SPDF projects, see “Final Status Report: Program Grants from the Satellite Program Development Fund,” December 30, 1988, University of Maryland Public Broadcasting Archives, Archives of NPR, Acc. No. 92-23 (Hereafter UMD NPR 92-23), Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder “SPDF History.”

<sup>4</sup> “Satellite Program Development Fund: History and Purpose,” UMD, Archives of NPR, Office of the General Counsel Files (Hereafter UMD NPR GCF), Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4.



singing, and instrumental “voices”) were used as markers of identities much as environmental sounds were used as markers of place; those identities became meaningful as part of a relational network expressed through the radiophonic figure of transmission. The documentary sound palette of *Maritime Rites* (1984) and its survey of the composer’s new-music scene were essential to the piece’s version of improvisation-based musical experimentalism *and* its ability to draw funding from the SPDF. The piece’s success as a radio broadcast has been evident in numerous rebroadcasts of the work, and because of sustained interest in the piece, Curran and New World Records issued a CD release of the piece in 2004.<sup>5</sup> Not only did *Maritime Rites* (1984) achieve the aims articulated by Curran in the proposal to the SPDF, but the long life it has enjoyed and its relatively extensive distribution provide evidence of the significant impact of NPR’s (limited) funds for innovative radio programming in the 1980s.

### ***Maritime Rites*: Curran’s “Signature Work”**

Curran’s concept work, *Maritime Rites*, has been performed frequently throughout the composer’s career, providing many opportunities for collaboration through improvisation. Curran has labeled it his “signature work,” celebrating the piece’s many versions with representative artwork and audio clips on his website. *Maritime Rites* fuses a number of Curran’s musical predilections, including his preference for sound installations exploring music and place, his use of ambient sound, the central role of musical improvisation, and his frequent use of the medium of radio. *Maritime Rites* had a parent composition in Curran’s *The Lake* (1978), which presented collective, geographically placed music making through group improvisation. The basic concept was that several small groups of people gathered in rowboats floating on a lake.

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<sup>5</sup> *Maritime Rites*, New World Records 80625-2.

While afloat, they vocalized improvisations based on graphic instructions drawn by Curran. The composer wrote of *The Lake*:

All I have done is to adopt the basic elements of an everyday piece of music-theater and focus our attention on these elements themselves: random polyphony, chance choreography, and music in true spatial motion. ... Wherever the boats move, so does the music; their “free choreography” tends to enhance and merge with the kinds of musical gestures that each boat is responsible for.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Lake*, the musicians themselves were sent into an outdoor “theater.” There was a sense of ritual in the piece that was heightened by having the participants sing even while boarding the boats, linking the land to the water-bound performance and paralleling the sonic link between land-bound lighthouse and sea-bound listener portrayed later in *Maritime Rites* (1984).

On his website, Curran stated only that *Maritime Rites* began “in the 1970s,” suggesting how organic the piece is to his musical sensibility, and perhaps, its fluid origins in other pieces such as *The Lake*. In a lecture delivered in 2011, however, Curran gave the piece a birthday, explaining that it was an outgrowth of a class he taught at the National Academy in Italy in 1979.<sup>7</sup> This performance in Rome (*Riti Marittimi*) was created for the students in the class, an example for them demonstrating the potential of using “natural spaces as theaters.”<sup>8</sup> Curran brought the piece to the U.S., where it was performed in 1981 in Minneapolis, and then in Chicago at the 1982 New Music America festival. In 1983, he applied for funding from the SPDF to create a public radio broadcast of the piece.

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<sup>6</sup> Alvin Curran, “*Maritime Rites \* The Lake*,” in *Words and Spaces: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Musical Experiments in Language and Sonic Environments*, ed. Stuart Saunders Smith and Thomas DeLio (New York: University Press of America, 1989), 185.

<sup>7</sup> Alvin Curran, “Music Outside the Concert Halls,” presentation in George Lewis’s composition seminar, Columbia University Music Department, March 22, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Curran has continued to develop the concept of *Maritime Rites* over the past three decades. For example, *Maritime Rites Wasserkorso* was presented in Berlin in 1987, where Curran used computer automation to operate high-decibel ship horns from a safe distance. The piece was also performed in 1991 in Sydney Harbor, where Curran enlisted the drivers/crews of State Transit ferries and tugboats, naval vessels, and private crafts to participate. Two barges carried conch-shell players, percussionists, and a didgeridoo player, and Curran improvised electronic sounds from a keyboard set up at the Sydney Opera House. Players were instructed to perform specific musical gestures at precise times.<sup>9</sup> Yet another performance of *Maritime Rites* was staged in 2007 on the Thames River in London. This version was designed to take advantage of the bells at St. Paul's cathedral (across the river from Tate Modern, which produced the piece), and included fragments/quotations from George Frideric Handel's *Water Music* and Charles Ives's arrangement of the hymn *Shall We Gather at the River?*<sup>10</sup>

Though the 1984 version of *Maritime Rites* was uniquely fitted to the medium of radio, it had important commonalities with these live versions. All performances were staged outside of concert halls, and were specifically linked to waterways. These waterways were populated with people using boats of various types—small rowboats, ferries, tugboats, or large vessels. The sounds of shiphorns, lighthouses, whistle buoys, and electronic/live music-making carried over the water and connected individuals. There was a certain hugeness to the piece in each of its incarnations—in the prohibitive volume of the shiphorns utilized, the expansive water spaces, and in the sheer scope of the logistical considerations. Another theme that arose due to the largeness of the piece has been the use of government equipment and organizations (ferries and

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<sup>9</sup> See Peter Cochrane, "A Concerto for Ferries and Harbour Noises," *Sydney Morning Herald* (October 13, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> The London Symphony Orchestra participated, as well as professional soloists and amateur musicians. See Louise Jury, "St. Paul's Rings Out for Modern-Day Water Music," *The Evening Standard* (September 11, 2007).

tugboats, the U.S. Coast Guard in 1984, and of course the U.S. public broadcasting system in 1984) to allow access to the necessary waterways, vessels, and airwaves.

The main difference between the broadcast and live versions of *Maritime Rites* was the use of recorded environmental sound, which allowed Curran to emphasize the piece's documentary qualities in his grant application to the SPDF. Curran used recognizable sounds of place to suggest specifically located presence, previously captured in live versions through the position of the performers' bodies. David Toop commented on the documentary quality of *Maritime Rites* (1984), calling it "oral reminiscence," "sonic documentation," and "short stories for the ears."<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the program note by Curran and Gould called the piece a "comprehensive aural documentary," and "an historical document of some of the most beautiful and mysterious sounds of the sea."<sup>12</sup>

But the themes of improvisation, communication, borders between land and sea, and spatial relationships suggest that the documentary impulse evident in Curran's and Gould's use of real-world sounds in the broadcast version of *Maritime Rites* stemmed less from a preservationist/historical urge and more from the deep connections this piece had with emplaced performance and the interaction of land sounds and water sounds. In other words, instead of preserving "real" sounds through recording, *Maritime Rites* (1984) used recording to explore new sonic relationships (discussed more in more detail in chapter 5).

The places evoked by the ambient sounds in *Maritime Rites* (1984) were largely imagined composites, since the ambient sounds and foghorns were chosen not only because of their location, but because of their musical properties. Thus, in saxophonist Steve Lacy's segment, a listener heard sounds from Maine, New York, and Maryland together in one auditory

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<sup>11</sup> Liner notes, *Maritime Rites*, New World Records 80625-2 (2004), 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

space. The sounds comprised a pitch collection and timbral palette that complemented Lacy's saxophone playing. Most segments were predominantly tonal or modal, emphasizing consonant intervals such as perfect fourths, fifths, and octaves. The fog horn signals and whistle buoys were used as pitches that were then treated as melodic and chordal components. Curran explored the signals' musical qualities (pitch, timbre, volume, duration) as well as their nautical communicative properties (conveyed largely through the testimony of speakers, including interviews with lighthouse keepers and Coast Guard officials).

Thus, the documentary quality of this piece was one that liberally re-worked spatial and temporal relationships, relinquishing claims to objectivity in pursuit of an imaginary sonic remembrance. While there were several lost sounds preserved in *Maritime Rites* (1984), including the "almost humanlike vocal sound of the Brooklyn Bridge" caused by vehicular traffic (now muted out of consideration to residents in earshot of the structure), such sounds were so embedded in the aural tapestry of the piece that they were difficult to isolate.<sup>13</sup> These real-world sounds became blurry wisps in a sonic memory, not neatly filed entries in some archive. This interpretation of Curran's real-world material is not, however, meant to relegate the broadcast version of *Maritime Rites* (1984) to an imitation of some live (and implicitly superior) iteration of the piece.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, the broadcast version added a new dimension; the medium of radio was uniquely suited to the themes of the piece.<sup>15</sup> The very idea of transmission

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 13. Bill Fontana has also used the sound of the Brooklyn Bridge in his work. See Fontana, "The Relocation of Ambient Sound: Urban Sound Sculptures," (no date) <http://www.resoundings.org/Pages/Urban%20Sound%20Sculpture.html>.

<sup>14</sup> On the valuation of "liveness" over recorded sound, see Philip Auslander, "Intellectual Property Meets the Cyborg: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Technology," *Performing Arts Journal* 14/1 (1992): 30–42.

<sup>15</sup> Composing for radio has been an important aspect of Curran's musical career. Other pieces for radio include *Crystal Psalms* (1988) for six choruses, six sextets, accordion, percussion, and tape; and *Erat Verbum* (1990–97) for natural sounds and live electronics.

via wireless technology implies the ability to collapse great distances, with far-away sounds made immediate to the listener through the arriving signal.<sup>16</sup> Not only were sounds from different places layered together in Curran's studio, but the new music/maritime sounds were broadcast into various listening spaces, mingling with the ambient environments of the listeners/receivers.

Even though its "real-world" sounds were inventively combined, the documentary quality of *Maritime Rites* (1984)—its claim to the "real"—was essential, because it helped Curran secure a place on air for the piece. It allowed his proposal to qualify as "radio art" and "documentary" to the SPDF, and it exemplified the link between documentary sound, new music, and experimental radio that I emphasized in the first chapter. I turn now to Curran's grant application and the SPDF's awarding process.

### **"A Special Alchemy:"<sup>17</sup> *Maritime Rites* and Public Radio**

Curran's *Maritime Rites* (1984) was chosen for funding during the ninth round of applications to the SPDF, a fund set up in 1980 by NPR. Over its eight-year existence, the SPDF awarded a total of \$4,319,010 for radio projects of many types.<sup>18</sup> Although it was operated from NPR's offices, it was designed to be an *independent* source of money for "radio production, distribution and marketing."<sup>19</sup> The SPDF was created by NPR "so that producers could take

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<sup>16</sup> See Douglas Kahn's use of "broadcasting" as a theoretical "figure of transmission" in "Histories of Sound Once Removed," in *Wireless Imagination*, ed. Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 1–29.

<sup>17</sup> Curran, "Grant Proposal for *Maritime Rites*," June 5, 1983, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: "C. Art, 1. 'Radio Art.'"

<sup>18</sup> Sandra Rattley [Director, SPDF], Letter to Richard Madden, December 26, 1988, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: "SPDF-History."

<sup>19</sup> "Satellite Program Development Fund," UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: "SPDF Background, Misc."

advantage of the satellite technology, and meet the demand for more diverse programming.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus the fund’s creation was directly related to the WESTAR satellite and its state-of-the-art sound capabilities. The fund also represented a concrete commitment to regular up-loads of non-NPR programming to the satellite, a commitment made in order to assuage fears about NPR’s centralized operation and control of the powerful broadcasting device.

NPR remained an important institutional presence in the creation of SPDF programming because it established the fund, housed its staff, and oversaw SPDF operation. Completed programs were to include the announcement: “This program was made possible by funds provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting through National Public Radio’s Satellite Program Development Fund.”<sup>21</sup> Yet finished SPDF programming did not belong to NPR, and SPDF moneys were preciously guarded from NPR’s overt control. While the SPDF encouraged grantees to pitch their completed projects to NPR, SPDF projects were legally required to be available (over WESTAR) to non-NPR member stations as well.<sup>22</sup>

The SPDF handbook clarified the fund’s distance from NPR, using capital letters to insist:

Programming funded by SPDF is not programming which “runs on National Public Radio.” ... If granted, you CANNOT present yourself as a representative of/or consultant for NPR, unless you negotiate a specific arrangement or contract with a program vehicle of NPR.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Satellite Program Development Fund” booklet, NPR UMD GCF, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4.

<sup>21</sup> “Corporation for Public Broadcasting, National Public Radio Production Agreement, SPDF,” Section III, Article 6 UMD NPR GCF, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4.

<sup>22</sup> Sometimes SPDF programs were essentially pilot programs, and they could be picked up and distributed by NPR, American Public Radio (APR), or another programming organization. This fortunate outcome, however, appears to have been the exception rather than the rule.

<sup>23</sup> “Satellite Program Development Fund” booklet UMD NPR GCF, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4. Emphasis in original.

Occasionally, completed SPDF projects were indeed acquired by NPR, and NPR would then provide money for distribution and marketing. If this was the case, grantees were required to return the portion of grant money originally dedicated to that purpose to the SPDF.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of this vigilance, there was a fluidity to the border between the SPDF and NPR, in part stemming from individuals simply working on programming that they were passionate about, and seeking funding wherever it was available. The SPDF guidelines specified that NPR member *stations* could apply for funding, and that a full-time NPR employee could be involved with a project, but that a current NPR employee could not “apply as the principal producer or project director.”<sup>25</sup> A letter from Lois Schiffer (a lawyer on the General Counsel at NPR) to Doug Bennet (then president of NPR) dealt with the “problem” of whether NPR could “support a joint venture with an entity funded by the SPDF.”<sup>26</sup> Schiffer saw no “legal problem” with NPR offering “time and assistance” to an applicant to the SPDF. But she did see “political problems with it, since it will clearly look like NPR is promoting its own programming with SPDF money.”<sup>27</sup> Thus ownership of the product was important for instituting a boundary, and “SPDF money” was viewed as separate from “NPR money.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sandra Rattley, Memo to Doug Bennet, “Application to SPDF for NPR joint ventures,” November 8, 1985, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “SPDF Background, Misc.”

<sup>25</sup> “Satellite Program Development Fund” booklet, UMD NPR GCF, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4.

<sup>26</sup> Lois Schiffer, Letter to Doug Bennet, November 26, 1985, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “SPDF Background, Misc.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> The SPDF Agreement clearly stated that “funding decisions of the SPDF are and will remain free from any influence, either direct or indirect, from the board or management of NPR,” and that “the funding annually provided to the SPDF is ... not available for discretionary or emergency use by NPR...” See “Corporation for Public Broadcasting, National Public Radio Production Agreement, SPDF,” Section IV, Article 1, UMD NPR GCF, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4.



The boundary between NPR-employee and SPDF-applicant could also be traversed freely as individuals' employment shifted. For example, Steve Rathe, after producing *Radio Net* and *RadioVisions*, departed NPR to begin his own radio production and distribution company in 1981.<sup>29</sup> He was then eligible to apply for funding from the SPDF, which he did successfully as producer for WNYC-FM's *New Sounds USA* in 1983, a project reporting on events at New Music America that year.<sup>30</sup> SPDF staff often had experience at NPR, as public radio was a small world. William Siemering, who was no longer an NPR employee but still creating stellar programming for public radio, served as a member of the first Programming Committee for the SPDF in 1980.<sup>31</sup> Thus a mix of cultural, institutional, and individual artistic influences facilitated the creation of SPDF programs and their distribution via public radio stations.

The SPDF was operated by a Director and a rotating seven-member Advisory Panel, all of whom made decisions about funding based on applicants' descriptions of their projects and their sample tape submissions.<sup>32</sup> Representing NPR's founding ideals for innovative programming, the SPDF was open to "all types and formats of programming," including:

documentaries, specials, live performances—news or public affairs features, radio drama, children's programs, comedy, commentary, programs about artists or musicians, bi-lingual programming, programming for or about specialized audiences, call-in shows.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> At that time, Rathe established his current venture, Murray Street Productions, which still distributes programming to NPR (including "Paul Winter's Winter Solstice Celebration"). See <http://www.murraystreet.com/index.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> *New Sounds USA*: "Proposal for Funding," UMD NPR 92-23, Box 217, Unnumbered Folder "Music/Opera, New/Contemporary." Steve Rathe produced *New Sounds USA*, and the SPDF application mentions *RadioVisions* as evidence of his competence.

<sup>31</sup> Memo, "Satellite Program Development Fund," September 19, 1979, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: "SPDF Background, Misc."

<sup>32</sup> "Satellite Program Development Fund," UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: "SPDF Background, Misc."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The SPDF announcement boasted, “everything you can think of can be considered.”<sup>34</sup> Applicants were also encouraged to submit either “discrete programming (one program or pilot)” or a “series of shows of any length,” showing the amount of artistic freedom built into the call for applications.<sup>35</sup>

If funded, the applicant was guaranteed that his/her program would be broadcast at least once via WESTAR. But grantees retained all rights to their programming, and were encouraged to distribute the completed program(s) elsewhere (such as the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, Pacifica stations, etc.). Retaining ownership of the completed program, as well as the opportunity for wide distribution via WESTAR, made funding through the SPDF attractive to both independent radio producers and composers.

The SPDF supported a significant number of projects on “new music.” Table 4.1 gives a sampling of projects dealing with new music and audio art. It shows that *Maritime Rites* (1984) was one of many programs featuring “new music.” It also demonstrates that a wide range of grantees received money (including individual producer/composers, public radio stations, and media organizations).

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

**Table 4.1: Sample of Completed SPDF Projects Labeled “New Music,” “American Music,” and “Audio Art”<sup>36</sup>**

Year	Grantee	Title	Description (if available) <sup>37</sup>
1981	Beth Anderson	Poetry is Music	Twenty eight-minute modules featuring artists working in the field of text-sound and poetry
1981	Charles Amirkhanian for the Exploratorium	New Music America	Seven 3-hour concerts recorded live at the June 1981 New Music America Festival
1982	Joanna/Jane Rosenthal	American Women Composers	Two half-hour documentaries on classical and new music composers
1982	Bill Fontana	Soundscapes	365 daily 4-minute stereo modules featuring field recordings of natural sounds, and the “music” of our environment
1982	David Moss	Soundspot	26, 3-minute modules of original new music composition
1983	WNYC-FM	New Sounds USA	Two four-hour programs telescope live performances from the 200 artists who performed at the New Music America Festival in Washington, DC, also weaving in archival material from the tape libraries of WNYC and KUSC
1983	Alvin Curran	Maritime Rites	A series of original music compositions in which improvisational composers perform to the accompaniment of nautical sounds.
1983	Bonnie Barnett	Tunnel Hum, USA	A one-hour experimental, interactive, live music event occurring simultaneously in San Francisco and New York
1984	Susan Stone	Loose Tongues	Six half hour shows, capture the music of tape, tongue and larynx – the work of performers who use organic sound, voice, words or wordless vocals in their compositions
1985	Frank Hoffman	US Ear	
1985	New Wilderness	New Ear	
1986	Garuda Productions	The Nature of Music	
1986	WGBH-FM	American Music Makers	
1986	Gregory Whitehead	In Absentia	

Notice the recurrence of the labels “US” and “American” in project titles and descriptions. While the SPDF did indeed fund many programs on classical, jazz, and what was labeled “ethnic” or “world” musics in the applications, almost all of the “new music” programs were expressly dedicated to “new American music.” There were members of the panel who may have been inclined to privilege new music created in the U.S., based on their own professional

<sup>36</sup> “Final Status Report: Program Grants from the Satellite Program Development Fund,” December 30, 1988, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “SPDF-History.”

<sup>37</sup> Available descriptions were gleaned from “Grantee Summaries,” UMD NPR GCF, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4. Variations on numerals (spelled and Arabic numerals), description style, and punctuation retained from original.

commitments and identities as composers. For example, U.S. composer and Pacifica radio veteran Charles Amirkhanian was on the SPDF Advisory Panel in 1983. Carl Stone (a regular in new music and radio, and the chair of the steering committee for New Music America 1985) was also chosen to be on the SPDF advisory panel for 1984.<sup>38</sup>

Curran proposed *Maritime Rites* for funding from the SPDF as a work of “Radio Art”—an apt description given the nature of the program. The composer’s grant application wisely highlighted the piece’s documentary quality (and thus drew on the important overlap between audio art/new music/radio discussed in chapter 1); he appealed to a national identity (what he called “our collective maritime history”); and he built on the stature of the composers included (appealing to music enthusiasts through the musicians’ reputations). The SPDF application required detailed descriptions regarding the nature of the project, the prospective grantee’s ability to complete such a project, and the applicant’s plans for distributing his/her work. See Table 4.2 for a list of relevant questions from the SPDF application form. These questions reveal some aspects of what the SPDF panel was looking for, and what may have indicated a solid investment to the fund’s advisory panel.

**Table 4.2: Required Information on SPDF Application<sup>39</sup>**

Selected Questions, SPDF Application Form
Project description
Producer’s relevant experience, accomplishments
The appropriateness and importance of this project for SPDF funding
Description of intended audience
Statement of marketing strategy
Statement of promotion strategy

<sup>38</sup> See “SPDF Advisory Panelist Nominations,” UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “NPR Board Action/SPDF.”

<sup>39</sup> Proposal for *Maritime Rites*, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “C. Art, 1. Radio Art.”

Notice that several of the questions focus on audience, marketing, and promotion, as well as the request for the project to be directly related to the SPDF's purpose.

Curran began his project description by establishing his qualifications as an experienced composer, and by emphasizing that the proposed piece was representative of the innovative and unique nature of his particular music-making:

The raw symphony of environmental sound that we live in has become the main source and inspiration for my music in the last twenty years. Of the handful of composers who work with natural sounds, I have become known for my skill in orchestrating them with acoustic and electronic instruments in live performance.<sup>40</sup>

His introduction positioned *Maritime Rites* as representative of his twenty-year career, and immediately introduced the key components of the piece as his areas of expertise: environmental sound, acoustic and electronic instruments, and live performance.

Curran explained in his project description that this version of *Maritime Rites* was specifically “conceived for radio.” It would feature the “138 principal fog horns on the eastern US seaboard, along with improvised performances by eleven distinguished musicians in the jazz, experimental and electronic music fields.” Perhaps anticipating questions related to the logistics of such a massive undertaking, Curran wrote, “Weather is not a factor in the recording; I have found the US Coast Guard most obliging in sounding fog horns for my musical use.”<sup>41</sup> Thus he inspired confidence that he had worked with fog horns—and more importantly, the people in charge of the musical fog horns—previously, and with great success.

The project description continued to emphasize that the medium of radio was central to the piece. Curran argued that through the recording and broadcast of its final segment, *Maritime*

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<sup>40</sup> Curran, “Proposal for Funding, SPDF,” June 5, 1983 UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “C. Art, 1. Radio Art.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

*Rites* (1984) would unite “the entire eastern seaboard in a single moment, a phenomenon possible only in radio.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, he summed up the project in one packed sentence:

*Maritime Rites*, in presenting the foghorn as indigenous American “found” music combined with outstanding performers of improvised music, is an essential and unusual aural documentary of our regional and national maritime heritage.

Importantly, Curran mentioned that this was *American* “found” music, appealing to national identity, which may have increased his application’s success.<sup>43</sup> Curran also reminded the reader of the qualifications of the performers who would be involved. He emphasized the piece’s status as radio documentary covering a shared “heritage.”

Curran returned to these themes when arguing that his project was “appropriate and important for SPDF funding”:

This series presents the fog horns of the eastern seaboard as an essential documentary of our regional and national maritime heritage, as well as the source of one of the most beautiful minimal musics around us. With them are presented some of the most inventive musicians on the American scene today. This special alchemy will result in thirteen programs of high musical quality and interest. *Maritime Rites* is conceived especially for radio, the only medium which can safely accommodate 138 fog horns at once and bring an entire coastline into anyone’s home. Non-commercial radio, for which this proposal is particularly intended, has played a great role in providing exposure to and promoting new music. SPDF, therefore, is the logical and appropriate funding agency for *Maritime Rites*.<sup>44</sup>

As Curran reiterated the nature of the project, he again emphasized a unique aspect of the medium: radio was not only the means for distribution, but it was the very thing that made his concept—listening to multiple, ear-splitting foghorns—accessible to the listener. He explicitly

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to verify whether this was the case from the archival record, as the panelists’ rationale and comments on the proposals were not preserved. To be fair, there may also have been many applications on “American music” that were rejected, a disproportionate number of proposals on “American music,” or another situation that influenced the results.

<sup>44</sup> Curran, “Proposal for Funding, SPDF,” June 5, 1983, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “C. Art, 1. Radio Art.”

noted the connections between “non-commercial radio” and new music, suggesting that public radio had served and advanced new music in the past.

Curran cast a wide net when describing his “intended audience.” He optimistically wrote, “aside from the welcome followers of jazz, electronic and environmental musics, I feel this project is intended for everyone.”<sup>45</sup> He continued:

I expect it will have special interest for regional audiences from where some of these pieces originate, but I hope it will have equal interest for inland audiences who may have never heard a fog horn. I feel both the nature of the programs and the reputations of the artists involved will create a certain amount of interest on a national scale.<sup>46</sup>

Thus he mentioned specific reasons (geographic and musical) for drawing avid listeners, while again emphasizing the reputations of the musicians involved.

Finally, Curran stated that he would hire a professional publicist “specializing in non-commercial radio distribution.” The SPDF was especially concerned with applicants’ commitment to marketing and promotion, even distributing a detailed handbook with instructions on how to do so successfully. The paperback book was titled *Selling Your Programming: Marketing Handbook*, and began with a reminder that “as you know, your responsibilities as a result of the grant [from the SPDF] go beyond program production. You must also distribute your programming, market, and produce it.”<sup>47</sup> Curran’s commitment to seek a professional publicist—and one specializing in *non-commercial* radio distribution—would have appealed to the Advisory Panel.

Curran was granted \$10,000 of the \$15,000 he requested, which allowed the composer and his collaborator Gould to travel along the Eastern seaboard and gather recordings of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Sandra Rattley, “Introduction,” *Selling Your Programming: Marketing Handbook*, by Kay Shaw (Washington DC: The Satellite Program Development Fund, 1984), 1.

foghorns, other ambient sounds, and interviews with lighthouse keepers. They also recorded improvisations by a number of musicians and poets: Leo Smith, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Lacy, Clark Coolidge, Joseph Celli, Jon Gibson, Malcolm Goldstein, George Lewis, and John Cage.<sup>48</sup> In an interview I conducted with Curran, he described the process of recording performers in practical terms:

The recordings were almost always made in a convenient room in the performers homes. (in the case of Lacy we found a large closet in the club in Bologna where Steve was about to perform, there, we huddled in this small dark space and I recorded his Coastline) It was simply not practical to bring the musicians to the far-flung sites of the bells, buoys and fog-horns ... almost everyone closely recorded in my microphones, in the familiarity of their own studio, ambient sounds included.<sup>49</sup>

His comments also acknowledge the importance of ambient sounds from the composer/performers' own environments—sounds that are difficult to isolate in the finished piece but were welcomed during the composition process. Curran then assembled the composition in his studio in Rome, joined by audio engineer Nicola Bernardini. *Maritime Rites* explored sonic signals (foghorns) as audible evidence of relationality.

The broadcast version of *Maritime Rites* consisted of nine segments of eleven minutes each, capped off by a concluding twenty-five minute segment (ten segments/movements in total). This closing segment was shorter than the hour-long finale Curran had proposed, yet it retained the sense of a finale because of its dense texture and twenty-five minute length. Each part of *Maritime Rites* (1984) was then broadcast individually and introduced on air by Curran with brief background information for the listeners before the actual piece began.<sup>50</sup> The subsequent

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<sup>48</sup> Curran, "Composer's Note," *Maritime Rites* (New World Records, 80625-2), 14.

<sup>49</sup> Email interview with Curran, November 4, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> The CD release includes the audio introductions to each section (*Maritime Rites*, New World Records, 80625-2).



programs layered improvisations (usually one primary performer/composer per segment) with stories, poetry, singing, foghorns, whistle buoys, and other ambient environmental sounds.

Compared to the commentary provided before and after each episode of NPR's *RadioVisions*, Curran's introductions for each segment were very brief. This was not—on its face—a didactic show dedicated to new music. Curran's introductions also differed significantly from *RadioVisions* in content. Instead of offering information on historical context and compositional method, Curran simply gave the performer's names and short résumé, any speakers' names and positions, and identified the main maritime and ambient sounds for the upcoming segment (such as the landmark lighthouses or the now-muted whistle of the Brooklyn Bridge). These comments were consistent with the composer's focus on identity and community as expressed through improvisation, as I will show below.

According to Curran's estimation, the completed programs were broadcast by about fifty radio stations in the United States.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately and surprisingly, SPDF records indicate that they had no reporting system that generated accurate carriage information. SPDF materials from 1985 contained the disclaimer, "under the current almost non-existent reporting system, neither the producers themselves nor NPR's Distribution Office can tell exactly how many stations actually broadcast any given SPDF funded program."<sup>52</sup> Records from the National Federation of Community Broadcasters' archives show that Curran and Gould made *Maritime Rites* (1984) available to community stations (including non-NPR member stations), as well.<sup>53</sup> The piece's distribution was widened by its release as a CD in 2004.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Curran, "Composer's Note," *Maritime Rites* (New World Records, 80625-2).

<sup>52</sup> "Satellite Program Development Fund, Production Agreement," UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: "SPDF/CPB Contract, FY 1984, 1985, 1986."

<sup>53</sup> A permission form for the National Federation of Community Broadcasters shows potential distribution on their member stations. See "NFCB Program Description Form" and "NFCB Producer's Classifieds Distribution

*Maritime Rites* (1984), therefore, appealed on several levels as a radio broadcast in 1984. It captured the overlap between radio documentary and *musique concrète* that has often characterized new music presentations on radio. Its medium was central to its conception. It clearly appealed to the SPDF (a hand-written note from the SPDF panel-meeting regarding Curran's application read, "Well done!"), and the project was successfully executed, promoted, and had a wider life beyond its broadcast.<sup>55</sup> The piece made good radio. I turn now to the piece's dual status as radio broadcast and electro-acoustic music, as the piece represented Curran's sonic geography of "some of the most inventive musicians on the American scene today."<sup>56</sup>

### **Improvisation, Voice, and Identity in *Maritime Rites* (1984)**

The common factor shared by the musicians featured in *Maritime Rites* (1984), and likely the element that made them so "inventive" in Curran's eyes, was their use of improvisation. Curran's personal definition of a "composer" in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries was, in part, tied to improvisation.<sup>57</sup> The metaphor of improvised expression as "voice" best describes the composer's connection between improvisation and performed identity:

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Agreement," UMD, Archives of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, Series 3 (Program Service) Box 10, Folder 25.

<sup>54</sup> Curran was able to use several parts of his grant application verbatim when constructing the liner notes for the CD. This lapse in time of twenty years was not the result of restrictions or copyright issues. Rather, Curran explained, "New World Records and I decided that it would be a timely thing to do, particularly for a musical-document, which had already generated much interest over the years, as well as live performances 'in situ' around the world. This for me is a positive signal, at least one which reflects a work which has had a very long life." Email interview with Curran, November 4, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> "Round 9, Panel Book," UMD NPR 92-23, Box 217, Unnumbered Folder: "Round 9, Panel Book."

<sup>56</sup> Curran, "Proposal for Funding, SPDF," June 5, 1983, UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: "C. Art, 1. Radio Art."

<sup>57</sup> Alvin Curran, "Music Outside the Concert Halls," presentation, Columbia University Music Department, March 22, 2011.

Improvisation is the art of becoming sound. It is the only art in which a human being can and must become the music he or she is making. It is the art of constant, attentive and dangerous living in every moment.<sup>58</sup>

This strong association between performer and sound is key to Curran's sense of improvising. It is important to note that Curran's notion of improvisatory expression was not a fixed identity or encapsulation of a persona—it was fluid, a “constant, attentive and dangerous living in every moment,” based on relationality.<sup>59</sup> It was a communicative practice, requiring a sender and receiver—a performer and listener. In *Maritime Rites* (1984), there was a rich, shifting metaphorical connection between spoken voice and composed/improvised/performed musical voice.

Curran's version of improvised expression resonates with philosopher Adriana Cavarero's definition of voice. Her take on voice is an important reparative gesture for acousmatic listening to recorded voices, and it can be expanded to relate to the metaphorical “voice” of improvisation. Cavarero provides a model for listening to the sounding voice as a *relational* marker of identity, an utterance meant to be heard and implying communication, dialogue and multiple identities. She does this by refusing to separate language/speech from bodily utterance, denying the mind/body binary that limits thinking about voice. She explains that speech should be understood as “a contingent, contextual sonorous articulation that emits from the mouth of someone and that is destined for the ears of another.”<sup>60</sup> This version of “voice” is a sophisticated construal of identity and sound where the expression is linked not only

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<sup>58</sup> Alvin Curran, “On Spontaneous Music” <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/spontaneous.html>. Portions published in Italian as “Della Musica Spontanea” in *Oltre il Silenzio* 2/2 (October 1996), and in English in *Contemporary Music Review* 25/5 (October 2006): 485–492.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, translated by Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 14.

to the one who makes it, but also to the larger community. And it is relevant to both improvised “voice” as well as recorded voice, both of which are featured and even productively combined by Curran in this piece.

In “On Spontaneous Music,” Curran elaborated and extended his argument on improvisation as personal utterance and expression of identity:

Regardless of the musical context (the people place or time, tradition or style) the art of improvisation puts the full responsibility for the music being made on the person/s making it, and for the entire duration of its making. Hence in improvisation the prevailing notions about the origins of music (the gods, collective memory, composers, mythology, etc.) are temporarily eclipsed by the sheer magical energy of the physical person/s making the music—for it is they who are momentarily but fully responsible for the sounds they make. It is they, the improvisers, in whom the traditional roles of composer, performer, director, and teacher are fused into one single role. It is they who in every sense become—literally ARE—the music they make.<sup>61</sup>

Curran’s use of the word “responsibility” implies an audience for the music being made—it implies an effect, and listeners to experience that effect. In other words, for Curran, the human performer (as opposed to a possessed vessel for the sublime) broadcasts their unique personhood through sound, sending it out to others and accepting responsibility for that sound.

Curran’s particular notion of improvisation and identity deeply informed *Maritime Rites*—both in live and broadcast versions. The composer explained that in *Maritime Rites* (1984), there were ten soundscapes,

over each of which I assigned one composer/performer (John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, Malcolm Goldstein, Steve Lacy, George Lewis, Leo Smith, Joe Celli, Jon Gibson, Clark Coolidge and myself) to contribute an independent improvised music—which by agreement I could integrate freely in any way I desired. This approach loosely paralleled my own solo performances over the previous decade using voice, flugelhorn, synthesizers and keyboards over complex mixes of taped natural sounds. Here however, I was manipulating the playing of my friends and colleagues as one would do today through sampling techniques. But again as in my own solo style, one could not tell where the foreground and background of either soloist or real recorded place/site was.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Curran, “On Spontaneous Music” <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/spontaneous.html>. Emphasis in original.

<sup>62</sup> Curran, “Out of Place,” (February 2000) <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/out%20of%20place.html>.

The composer's admission that he was "manipulating the playing of [his] friends and colleagues" suggests that he was juxtaposing people's improvisatory voices just as carefully as he was positioning the sounds of places and the voices of interviewees.

Curran's improvisational aesthetic in *Maritime Rites* had roots in his earlier performing career, and especially in his work with *Musica Elettronica Viva* (MEV). He acknowledged that the influence of MEV was "notably evident in a series of works begun in the late seventies which were created exclusively for the voice and for large groups of non-professional musicians," including *Maritime Rites*.<sup>63</sup> He stressed the collaborative nature of the improvisation in *Maritime Rites*, as well as the importance of "the voice" in the piece. In fact, of the list of musicians involved with *Maritime Rites* (1984), Coolidge, Lacy, and Lewis had all collaborated with MEV, a group now devoted to the performance of live electronic music (primarily improvised), and founded by Curran, Allan Bryant, Jon Phetteplace, Carol Plantamura, Frederic Rzewski, Richard Teitelbaum, and Ivan Vandro in 1966.<sup>64</sup> In their early days, the members were seeking to create more than a performing group; they were participating in a social and musical experiment, where "free music—and freeing music and musicians—became an ideological as well as an aesthetic obsession."<sup>65</sup> Amy Beal details the history of MEV, examining the group's influences in Rome, including the political events of the 1960s and arguing that:

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<sup>63</sup> Alvin Curran, "Making Music With People You Have Never Seen Before and Will Likely Never See Again," March 29, 1985, <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/music%20with%20people.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Though the group still occasionally performs, it had its heyday in the 1960s. Amy Beal, "'Music is a Universal Human Right': Musica Elettronica Viva," in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 99–120.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 107. Using improvisation as a social model has been a ubiquitous approach for theorists and scholars. See, for example, Jacques Attali's influential work, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), as well as Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, eds. *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).

Sharing a ritualized space with the group, free from the constraints of ensemble hierarchies or confines of a score, anyone could express themselves musically while listening to other voices, an idea closely connected to the soul-searching political discussions—sometimes loud, heated, and emotional; sometimes decisively productive—taking place on college campuses and elsewhere all over the Western world.<sup>66</sup>

Beal's characterization of MEV's musical interactions as "discussions," as well as her assertion that participants were expressing themselves "while listening to other voices" suggests that the metaphor of improvisation and voice was a powerful one growing out of her interviews and archival materials. It also describes MEV's commitment to improvisation as an inherently social practice.

Curran's improvisational aesthetic was also influenced by his personal experiences playing popular musics, especially those with roots in black cultural expression. He has noted:

the powerful influence and ubiquitous aura of Afro-American musics now evident in practically every musical culture on the planet; this poses a formidable counterweight to a once exclusive, essentially white European cultural monopoly and at the same time offers a mesmeric source of alternative musical energy—witnessed particularly by my own generation in its successive attraction to blues, Dixieland, swing, be-bop, rock, free jazz, post-free, hip-hop—and leaving its stamp on art music from Debussy to David Lang.<sup>67</sup>

In spite of the idealistic claim that MEV was "attempting to literally reinvent music from zero,"<sup>68</sup> the personal experiences and formative practices of the musicians involved meant that such erasure was a largely impossible, if troubling fantasy. Processing his experiences with MEV later, Curran wrote of the group's influences, countering the notion of "invention from zero":

Youthful, even naive, we all shared a desire to strip ourselves naked, liberating ourselves from the vestments of the past and present. Our techniques and concepts grew directly

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<sup>66</sup> Beal, "Music is a Universal Human Right," 110.

<sup>67</sup> Curran, "Music 24/7," in "The Score: Four Innovative American Composers Sound Off," *New York Times Blog* (March 11, 2007), <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/Music%2024-7%20NYT.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Curran, "On Spontaneous Music," <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/spontaneous.html>.

from the fertile soil prepared by Cage, Tudor and Mumma in the late 50's -early Sixties and by the work of the AACM...and the Arts Ensemble of Chicago.<sup>69</sup>

Curran has acknowledged the contributions of black improvising musicians, and realized that group improvisation “centered on the newly emerging skill for the individual players to perceive the totality of music not only in the present, but in the past and future as well.”<sup>70</sup> Thus there was a notion of their improvised music as connected to history, as well as a hope for constructing a music of the future.

Curran also noted a conflict between the utopian group improvisation of MEV and the idea of personal expression:

In the context of these liberational melees, improvisation per se was an academic issue. Yet improvisation and the individual skills we had all quickly developed was a kind of sacred burning bush which has remained a strong source of inspiration to most of us to this day, as well as to a large number of musicians who performed with us in the 70's and 80's (Garrett List, Steve Lacy, Anthony Braxton, Maryanne Amacher, Karl Berger to name a few).<sup>71</sup>

This idea of improvisation as personal expression, drawn from the individual skills associated with personal experience, was more in line with the notion of improvisation that would later be presented in *Maritime Rites* (1984). Notably, List and Lacy were two of the musicians featured in *Maritime Rites* (1984). Beal amplifies this narrative in her history of MEV with examples of the way the use of “individual skills” played out, and she cites such conflicts as fissures in the

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<sup>69</sup> Alvin Curran, “From the Bottom of the Soundpool,” August 6, 2000, ed. Susan Levenstein (published in German as “Improvisationspraxis der Musica Elettronica Viva” in *MusikTexte* 86/87, November 2000) <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/soundpool.html>. The “AACM” is the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Curran clearly sees a link between the AACM and MEV, yet his claim of direct influence here is dubious simply because of chronology, as George Lewis has noted.

<sup>70</sup> Alvin Curran, “From the Bottom of the Soundpool,” August 6, 2000, <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/soundpool.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

utopian goals of the group.<sup>72</sup> It is notable that when Curran left the group, it was to pursue a solo career.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, while Curran's improvisational aesthetic had roots in his founding role with MEV, his was an evolving position that increasingly focused on improvisation as personal voice.

It is not a given that improvisation should be heard as an "expression of the improviser" or personal voice. The metaphor has political import. George Lewis's distinction between "Afrological" and "Eurological" improvisational practices shows how improvisation—especially as a marker of voice—has been fraught with the politics of identity.<sup>74</sup> According to Lewis, "Eurological" improvisation has attempted to establish a *tabula rasa* or break with the past. This is an approach to improvisation that has placed a premium on circumventing expression of personal identity, and is exemplified (for Lewis and others) in the music of Cage. Conversely, Lewis explains that an "Afrological" approach to improvisation has been based on remembering history, utilizing quotation, and building and asserting an African-American identity to combat the all-too-pervasive occurrence of cultural erasure.

Language defining "improvisation" has been used to reinforce boundaries, as Lewis explains. He cites Anthony Braxton's critique that "both aleatory and indeterminism are words which have been coined ... to bypass the word improvisation and as such the influence of non-white sensibility."<sup>75</sup> Lewis adds to Braxton's critique by incorporating John Fiske's comments on theorizing whiteness through "exnomination":

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<sup>72</sup> Beal, "'Music is a Universal Human Right': Musical Elettronica Viva," 106–107.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>74</sup> George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002): 217.

<sup>75</sup> Anthony Braxton, *Tri-Axiom Writings, volume I* ([San Francisco?]: Synthesis Music, 1985), 366, quoted in Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950," 223.



Exnomination is the means by which whiteness avoids being named and thus keeps itself out of the field of interrogation and therefore off the agenda for change. ... One practice of exnomination is the avoidance of self-recognition and self-definition.<sup>76</sup>

In the context of Lewis's work, Curran's use of improvised voice as a marker of identity could be seen as political. In fact, Lewis has noted that Curran's approach to improvisation breaks away from a Cagian approach, embracing identity and personality as central elements of musical expression. He writes,

even in Eurological music the notion of personal narrative and autonomy has been the subject of debate. Though the members of the innovative improvisation group Musica Elettronica Viva (including pianist Alvin Curran, electronic improviser Richard Teitelbaum, trombonist Garrett List, and pianist Frederic Rzewski) have all had close associations with Cage, their ideas about group improvisation—as with other “post-Cage improvisers” such as Malcolm Goldstein—seem to part company with Cage's views.<sup>77</sup>

This is not to say that Curran's approach to improvisation is inherently “Afrological.” Lewis's terms are not simply categories into which one can drop approaches to improvisation, and it is important to remember (as Lewis explains) that they are two “historically emergent and not ethnically essential” versions of improvisation. Rather, Lewis's terms are valuable interpretive rubrics because they reveal what is at stake when identity is erased from musical expression—especially improvisation.<sup>78</sup> In this sense, Cavarero's work can also be read as an (indirect) extension of Lewis's writing, as Cavarero's theory acknowledges that identities tied to musical utterances are not fixed or essential. They are fluid, time-based, expressions of experience, always implying relationality through the notions of communication and audience.

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<sup>76</sup> John Fiske, *Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 42, quoted in Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950,” 224.

<sup>77</sup> Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950,” 243. Goldstein was also featured in a segment of *Maritime Rites* (1984).

<sup>78</sup> For more on the historiographic implications of improvisation and race/ethnicity, see George E. Lewis, “Gittin’ To Know Y’all: Improvised Music, Interculturalism, and the Racial Imagination” *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 1/1 (2004), <http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/view/6>.

Curran's version of improvisation was not necessarily shared by all of the musicians included in *Maritime Rites* (1984). His participants had their own, nuanced musical aesthetics and ideals related to improvisation, even though some overlap existed. MEV offered shared ground where some of the participants (Lewis, Lacy) had worked together on an occasional basis, but the group (in its original blossoming) had long dissolved. Rather, Curran's own approach to improvisation was evident in his *presentation* of his peers' improvised musics. Just as the music presented was rearranged and juxtaposed with ambient sound, it was also refracted through the composer's improvisational aesthetic.

For example, Cage's segment might be heard as out of place within the context of a piece on improvisation, as Lewis and Braxton (among others) have argued that Cage's notion of "freedom" in music centered more around the self-erasing "aleatory" and "chance" than "improvisation."<sup>79</sup> Cage's segment in *Maritime Rites* (1984)—using his spoken voice and "silences"—captured Cage's influence on Curran, even while it may have gone against Cage's own notions regarding self-expression.<sup>80</sup> Curran has commented on the incongruity between what he and his peers were doing (under the influence of Cage) in the 1960s and '70s and what Cage may have intended:

You all know that Cage abhorred improvisation—he shunned the word, concept and practice all his life. But this didn't seem to dampen his affection for all of us whom he continued to support and influence as well for many years...It seemed to me that with all the discussions about utopia, anarchy etc, ... the interesting thing is that we (MEV) were clearly making a new kind of chance music—not made from known or invented systems, but based on the risk (in every sense) of bringing people together to make music

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<sup>79</sup> See David W. Bernstein, "John Cage and the Aesthetic of Indifference," in *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Edgard Varèse, William De Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Steven Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2002): 113–134.

<sup>80</sup> Curran, "Cage's Influence," *Writings Through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art*, ed. David Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 177–179.

anywhere without a score. This is something that Cage could not consider nor likely ever approve of.<sup>81</sup>

It seems fitting that, rather than using a composition by Cage, Curran asked him to simply recite five words (ice, dew, food, crew, ape), accessing the composer's performed spoken voice through recording.<sup>82</sup>

Curran's approach to honoring mentors in his personal journey was also evident in the finale to *Maritime Rites* (1984), where he layered his own voice to create a large chorus. He included a "play on the word 'rite'" by his teacher at Yale, Elliott Carter, crediting him even as he acknowledged how much his own compositional practices departed from his teacher's.<sup>83</sup> Curran's use of ambient sound (key to his musical aesthetic, and inspired by Cage) was maximized in the finale, as he incorporated "more than sixty foghorns and bells, gongs, whistles, and ships' horns, all recorded on location between New Brunswick, Canada, and Chesapeake Bay," as well as the sound of the Brooklyn Bridge and a recording of a folklorist.<sup>84</sup> Curran's artistic fingerprint and aesthetic sensibilities infused the presentation of documentary and improvised sonic material in *Maritime Rites* (1984).

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. Also available online at <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/aroundundercage.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Curran explained, "In 1984 I invited John to collaborate as one of the ten soloists in my *Maritime Rites* project. I asked him to record 5 monosyllabic words of his choice ('Ice, Do [*sic*], Food, Crew, Ape') for me. 'Is that all?' he asked, ingenuously. I paired those beautifully soft-spoken words—in hocketed loops—with one of the most powerful fog-horns ever built, installed on the Nantucket Lightship II." Curran, <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/aroundundercage.html>. Curran's article includes a scanned copy of a note from Cage regarding *Maritime Rites*, as well as confirmation that the words used were "ice, dew, food, crew, ape."

<sup>83</sup> Liner notes, *Maritime Rites*, 13. Curran wrote elsewhere, "Neither my mentor and teacher Elliott Carter nor I could have known that I would go off and write successful string quartets and works for fog horns, 6-hour piano concerts and radio soundscapes of insects and moving air." See "Music 24/7," "The Score," *New York Times Blog* (March 11, 2007), <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/Music%2024-7%20NYT.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Liner notes, *Maritime Rites*, 13.

### *Maritime Rites* as a “Sonic Geography” of New Music<sup>85</sup>

Finally, I turn to the specific improvisational voices presented in *Maritime Rites* (1984), and discuss their implications for collecting and performing the category of musical experimentalism. Unlike *RadioVisions*, which was specifically designed to cover the topic of new American music, *Maritime Rites* had no such goals. *RadioVisions* had educational, hour-long segments that editorialized on compositional trends through collections of pieces by many composers. On the other hand, *Maritime Rites* (1984) featured one performer per segment, with no commentary on style or compositional approach. Only the performers’ materials and instruments were noted, with brief mention of their experience as performing musicians. Yet this orienting information and the episodic nature of the broadcast version of the piece could also be heard as a “sonic geography” of a particular musical grouping. This was emphasized by Curran when he called attention to the piece’s presentation of “some of the most inventive musicians on the American scene today.”<sup>86</sup> According to Dan Warburton’s review, “the list of the participating musicians reads like a Who’s Who of new music at the interface of composition and improvisation.”<sup>87</sup>

Speaking directly about the performers chosen for *Maritime Rites* (1984), as well as invoking a larger experimental music community, Curran explained:

The concept composer/performer (certainly not a new one at all) became re-proposed as

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<sup>85</sup> Curran used the phrase to describe both *Piece for Peace* (1985) and *Maritime Rites*. He explains, “Both works were not only conceptually based on uniting sounds from very distant places but evoked the literal meaning of ‘place’ in their sonic mirroring of geographic design and shape- what I later called ‘Sonic Geography.’” Curran, “Out of Place,” *Positionen* 42 (Feb. 2000) <http://www.alvincurran.com/writings/out%20of%20place.html>. He also composed a piece titled *Sonic Geography*, which was performed at New Music America festival in 1985 in Los Angeles.

<sup>86</sup> Curran, “Proposal for Funding, SPDF,” June 5, 1983 UMD NPR 92-23, Box 211a, Unnumbered Folder: “C. Art, 1. Radio Art.”

<sup>87</sup> Warburton, “Contemporary,” *Paris Transatlantic Magazine: Global Coverage of New Music* (January 2005) [http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/monthly2005/01jan\\_text.html](http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/monthly2005/01jan_text.html).

such (a unifying slogan) in the mid-late 1960's in and around the community of musicians featured in *Source Magazine*—largely an initiative of Larry Austin. This description fit the multiple emerging directions and roles that experimental musicians were experiencing at that time. Directions and roles which were defining alternative musical, social and economic spaces outside of the conventions, goals and productions of the well known musical institutions. The resulting sense of independence itself was exhilarating. And this same sensibility—of being able to make music in any way with any means and any body, was indeed a direct catalyst for the making of my *Maritime Rites*. The bringing together of composers, improvisers, poets, and electronic music makers from all corners of the musical globe was not only my intention but a most natural thing to do, i.e. make a piece in which the whole “family” of like-minded composer/performers were invited participants. Ones who needed no translation, or score or other excuse to make music. This was a group of people who by the time of the mid-seventies, early eighties had already developed extremely rich and personal dialects from a single emerging universal language--spontaneous music making. Everything else, including individual musical contributions was based on personal trust.<sup>88</sup>

The composer's comments highlight a number of themes frequently ascribed to experimentalism, such as a flight from “traditional musical institutions,” and a sense of infinite sonic possibility through embracing music made by any means. Curran also cited the seminal publication, *Source*, which served to connect, collect, and promote new music in the 1960s. Notice also that Curran again asserted the importance of personal voice and expression through “spontaneous music.” The loose “survey” of *Maritime Rites* (1984) grouped together musicians who were united primarily through their experimental approach to sound, use of improvisation/spontaneity, and personal/professional connections to Curran.

With the exception of the introduction to Oliveros's segment in *Maritime Rites* (the topic of chapter 5), neither the race/gender/ethnicity of each performer—nor their style or genre of playing was mentioned in the segments' introductions. On one hand, the glimpse of new American music offered by the piece was a less constrictive representation of the many experimentalists making new music in the 1980s than *RadioVisions* had been, especially because it did not lump composers according to their performing style. On the other hand, the small scope

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<sup>88</sup> Email interview with Curran, November 4, 2011.

of *Maritime Rites* (1984), featuring only one composer per segment, could not represent the sheer number of diverse individuals focused on improvisation in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although *Maritime Rites* (1984) can be heard as an informal survey, by refraining from didacticism, the piece was not weighed down by its potentially educational function. *Maritime Rites*'s identity as a piece encompassed sound art, documentary, improvisation, and radiophonic composition. As Curran's take on improvisation in experimental music, *Maritime Rites* (1984) exhibited the type of communication-based spontaneous music making that was practiced during his time in MEV, as well as Curran's commitment to personal music making and individualism. It was based on earlier, staged works by the composer, yet the broadcast version was designed to be uniquely radiophonic and accessible as short public radio broadcasts. In the context of public radio, a listener could hear *Maritime Rites* as a series of short audio segments featuring improvisational practices in experimental music. Or, another listener could home in on the maritime sounds and hear the piece as musically enhanced documentary of the Eastern U.S. seaboard. Curran's non-didactic approach in the piece helped cement its identity as an electroacoustic work that would succeed outside the context of public radio.

In the case of *Maritime Rites* (1984), NPR's SPDF served as gatekeeper to the public airwaves, as well as to much-needed financial support. In his application to the SPDF, Curran centered on key aspects of his project that made it appealing as a radio project: its documentary sound, its use of the Eastern U.S. seaboard, and its feature of prominent musicians. With NPR reeling from restructuring due to debt, and unable to embark on large-scale experimental programming (indeed, struggling even to support its popular news programs), the SPDF provided the means for public broadcast for *Maritime Rites* (1984) as well as other new music programming. The funding was modest when compared to NPR's overall budget, but even these

smaller grants translated into a relatively large musical venture for a savvy composer. Curran explained to me that he was:

greatly indebted to the NPR for producing this set of radio pieces—because it was a launching pad for my making other works for radio in Europe and forms of site-specific works elsewhere in the world, derived directly from the *Maritime Rites* original experience.<sup>89</sup>

Because of NPR's limited role in the creation of SPDF programs, the resulting pieces were not homogenized to conform to an NPR sound, or subjected to changes based on audience response data. *Maritime Rites* (1984) was thus promoted by its composer, though made possible by NPR money.

As NPR's cultural programming became less risky, the sense among composers that the institution was not a committed patron of new music was augmented. People creating radio art still found space for their work in the public radio world, but that support did not generally come directly from the increasingly large and mainstream NPR. Nonetheless, NPR's SPDF provided funds, marketing help, and a means of distribution to a national audience in the 1980s, effectively supporting and directly influencing new music during that time. NPR's early sonic experimentation (exemplified by Siemering's "Purposes" and Neuhaus's *Radio Net*) was extended through programming funded by the SPDF, allowing composers and radio producers present new American music to a radio-listening public.

In the following chapter, I focus on one specific segment of *Maritime Rites* (1984) in order to more fully describe and interpret its sonic composition. My interpretation of segment two of *Maritime Rites* (1984), "Rattlesnake Mountain," relies on the piece's status as a "sonic geography" of new music, as well its presentation of gendered voices and identities. In doing so,

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<sup>89</sup> Email interview with Curran, November 4, 2011.

I argue that *Maritime Rites* (1984) has special significance for understanding how voices conjure meaning in radiophonic experimental music, moving from voice as singular identity to voice as communicative identity.



## Chapter 5

### THE VOICES OF SIRENS IN “RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN”

Segment two of *Maritime Rites* (1984) was especially peaceful and meditative. Titled “Rattlesnake Mountain,” it featured Pauline Oliveros on accordion and voice.<sup>1</sup> The periodic tonal exhales of a whistle buoy were artfully combined with lapping waves and bird songs to set a relaxed pace. Curran’s version of “Rattlesnake Mountain” rewarded close listening to its unconventional sounds and trance-like pace. Oliveros’s original version of *Rattlesnake Mountain* was an improvisatory piece for accordion and voice based on her experience of nature. It “evolved through watching the mountain” across from her home in the Catskill mountains of New York, and was always performed by watching or envisioning the mountain.<sup>2</sup> The piece was a personal meditation, preserved not in notation, but in Oliveros’s musical imagination and personal subjectivity. Curran layered Oliveros’s accordion solo with pitched ambient sounds to form consonant harmonies. Emerging organically from the piece’s minimalist texture, a listener could also hear U.S. Coast Guard officer Karen McLean speaking about her duties as a lighthouse keeper. McLean’s voice provided linguistic guidance amidst the ebbing and flowing music and sounds of “Rattlesnake Mountain.” She offered moments of storytelling that grabbed the listener’s attention through the power of linguistic orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> Recordings of *Rattlesnake Mountain* are available radiom online at <[http://www.alvincurran.com/Curran\\_works.html](http://www.alvincurran.com/Curran_works.html)> and on the CD *Pauline Oliveros: Accordion & Voice*, IMPREC CD 140, 2007 (reissue of LP1901, Lovely Music, Ltd., 1982). Curran retained Oliveros’s title when he used the piece in segment two of *Maritime Rites* (1984). In this chapter, the title in quotation marks indicates the second segment of *Maritime Rites* (1984). Italics designate Oliveros’s original piece.

<sup>2</sup> Oliveros explained her inspiration for *Rattlesnake Mountain* in an interview on San Francisco’s KPFA radio station with Charles Amirkhanian (21 February, 1985). Available online at <<http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=SOM.1985.02.21.A>>.

In spite of the differences between various performances of *Rattlesnake Mountain*, Curran's setting remained loyal to Oliveros's concept of the piece. Oliveros generally began the piece with long, sustained notes (octaves and fifths, creating audible overtones) with rambling scalar patterns eventually added over these pitches. The composer vocalized in tandem with the accordion, emphasizing the connection between her lungs and the "breathing" bellows of the instrument. It was perhaps the personal nature of this piece, as well as its link to a specific place, that made *Rattlesnake Mountain* so appropriate as a landlocked, mountainous contrast to the wave and buoys sounds of its re-contextualized position in *Maritime Rites* (1984). In performing *Rattlesnake Mountain* for *Maritime Rites*, Oliveros performed from the coastline.

This segment of *Maritime Rites* attracted my attention not only because of its enticing ambient sounds and Oliveros's lilting improvisation, but also because of the way Curran presented the segment's spoken and musical voices as gendered. Curran identified McLean via the broadcast introduction to the segment as "the only female lighthouse keeper in America."<sup>3</sup> Oliveros also happened to be the sole female composer featured in *Maritime Rites* (1984), though Curran made no mention of this singularity. I thus hear two women's voices serenading—McLean's spoken voice and Oliveros's improvisational "singing" through her breathing accordion—and I imagine those voices (especially with their accompanying coastal environmental sounds) as the voices of Sirens calling from Maine's rocky shores.

In this chapter, I pursue a reading of "Rattlesnake Mountain" based on the maritime trope of the Siren. I argue that, as with Adriana Cavarero's metaphorical Sirens (the main source for my reading of the piece), McLean's and Oliveros's voices are most productively heard as

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<sup>3</sup> Track 9, "Program Introduction II," *Maritime Rites* (New World Records 80625-2).

communicative and relational rather than as isolated utterances.<sup>4</sup> “Rattlesnake Mountain” offers an opportunity to demonstrate, using “sonic particularities,” a specific case in which Cavarero’s notion of voice can apply to the analysis of electroacoustic music, especially as a complement or an alternative to acousmatic/schizophonic listening.<sup>5</sup>

I position myself as listener in relation to the voices in this reading of “Rattlesnake Mountain,” acknowledging my place in determining the communicative/relational nature of the piece.<sup>6</sup> “Rattlesnake Mountain” never explicitly mentions Siren song, and its play of sounds invites multiple hermeneutic tools. I utilize the trope of the Siren not as a Rosetta Stone to decode this audio text, but rather as a tool for one purposeful reading at a sonic “site of interpretive struggle.”<sup>7</sup> As Tia DeNora has argued, analysis (or “determining meaning”) involves “mobilizing particular features of utterances in order to produce meanings and ongoing scenic locations from within the interaction order, providing new ‘versions’ of reality, new assertions, new definitions of situations, new cultural materials.”<sup>8</sup> In “mobilizing” the metaphor of the Siren

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<sup>4</sup> See Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), especially pp. 103–116.

<sup>5</sup> Sumanth Gopinath compellingly explains, “it is necessary to focus on sonic particularities before we can make more *concrete* observations and thereby emerge with a powerful reading of an aesthetic utterance.” See “The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich’s *Come Out*,” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press), 122.

<sup>6</sup> In focusing on my listening subjectivity, I am indebted to the reflexive music-theoretical voices of Marion Guck and Marianne Kielian-Gilbert, whose work first introduced me to the power of theorist as listener. See Guck, “A Woman’s (Theoretical) Work,” *Perspectives of New Music* 32/1 (1994): 28–43, and Kielian-Gilbert, “Of Poetics and Poiesis, Pleasure and Politics—Music Theory and Modes of the Feminine,” *Perspectives of New Music* 32/1 (1994): 44–67.

<sup>7</sup> See Gopinath, “The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich’s *Come Out*,” 123.

<sup>8</sup> Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38. Creating yet one more close reading is somewhat at odds with DeNora’s project, yet I think that her explanation is valuable for reflexivity and homing in on the critic’s intentions, as well as for understanding the critic’s place in generating meaning for sonic artifacts (as does Gopinath, with a similar caveat, see “The Problem of the Political,” 123–4). Another important model for close reading as reflexively “producing meanings” (specifically in electroacoustic music) is Katharine Norman, *Sounding Art: Eight Literary Excursions through Electronic Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

to generate another meaning for “Rattlesnake Mountain,” I strategically move away from the acousmatic singular evident in the voice/body split so often invoked in analyses of electroacoustic music, and toward the communicative plural: directed sonorous intention.

### **A Lonely Representation**

Though Curran marked the vocal presence in “Rattlesnake Mountain” as feminine by announcing that speaker Karen McLean was the only “female lighthouse keeper in America,” he did not draw attention to Oliveros’s lone presence as “female composer” in the context of the piece. No verbal description revealed this identity, save for the pronoun “her” referring to Oliveros in Curran’s broadcast introduction.<sup>9</sup> Yet by pairing Oliveros with McLean (and by labeling McLean “female”), he effectively (if unintentionally) highlighted their shared gender. Thus the series’ end result was a collection of ten broadcasts populated almost entirely by male voices (compositional, sung, and spoken), with one solitary segment dedicated to a female voice. This singularity was important for two reasons. First, the presentation of isolated female composers has been par for the course within the overwhelmingly male-dominated received history of experimental music, a narrative that has been challenged only recently.<sup>10</sup> Second,

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<sup>9</sup> Track 9, “Program Introduction II,” *Maritime Rites* (New World Records 80625-2).

<sup>10</sup> For example, note the lack of women in Michael Nyman’s defining text on experimentalism. See Nyman *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). It is telling that journalistic (as opposed to more historical) accounts of experimental music include ample evidence of women composing and performing, suggesting the vital role that women have played in creating new music. See, for example, published collections of music writing from New York City’s *Village Voice*: Tom Johnson, *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972–1982: A Collection of Articles Originally Published in The Village Voice* (The Netherlands: Colophon, 1989), and Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Oliveros has often been the very woman who has earned a place in a canon of experimental music, standing in and appearing to balance the results.<sup>11</sup>

Curran's *Maritime Rites* replicated Oliveros's frequent position as representative "woman composer" in scholarship on experimental music. Nonetheless, *Maritime Rites*—while gently *implying* a survey through its composer-dedicated segments—was not a history text, nor was it designed to educate listeners or define "new music," as *RadioVisions* was. I do not mean to criticize Curran for an historiographic project upon which he did not embark. Oliveros's and McLean's participation in *Maritime Rites* (1984) tore at the tightly woven fabric of a primarily male documentation of both the caretakers of the Eastern seaboard and American experimentalism, even as it re-inscribed their singularity in those contexts.<sup>12</sup>

The (over)representation of one or a few artists at the expense of many has been called the "excess visibility" model. It is a problem for minority artists because it seemingly resolves inequity, but in reality often serves to shut down further dialogue. For example, Jean Fisher writes, "cultural marginality [is] no longer a problem of invisibility but one of excess visibility in

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<sup>11</sup> Oliveros is the only female composer represented in the influential collection *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004). Andra McCartney offered a strong critique of *Audio Culture* at the ninth Feminist Theory & Music Conference in Montreal, Canada, 2007 (Pre-concert Panel Discussion: Gender, Improvisation and the Body). Oliveros is also the only woman in Catherine Cameron's list of "composer commentaries" in *Dialectics in the Arts: The Rise of Experimentalism in American Music* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996). Another notable female composer who has served as simultaneously representative and exceptional (in spite of the strong musical work of her female peers, including Marion Bauer and Miriam Gideon) is Ruth Crawford Seeger. On this singularity, see Judith Tick, "Writing the Music of Ruth Crawford into Mainstream Music History," in *Ruth Crawford Seeger's Worlds: Tradition and Innovation in Twentieth-Century American Music*, ed. Ray Allen and Ellie M. Hisama (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 11–32. On Seeger's, Bauer's, and Gideon's valuable roles in constructing musical modernism in the U.S., see Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> The only other audible female voice in *Maritime Rites* (1984) is that of dancer Simone Forti in segment 5 (featuring improviser/composer Joseph Celli), who can be heard singing an original sea chantey.

terms of a reading of cultural difference that is too easily marketable.”<sup>13</sup> Glossing Fisher’s statement, Kobena Mercer explains, “Cultural difference appears more visibly integrated into mainstream markets than ever before, but it is accompanied by a privatised ethos in which it is no longer an ‘issue’ for public debate.”<sup>14</sup> While Fisher and Mercer were describing markets and art exhibits, their critique is also relevant to historiographic representation.

Musicologist James Currie has noted the same phenomenon in his provocative argument for revaluing the tricky construct of the “music itself”:

Many in the academy have been tempted by the belief that difference is a kind of Trojan horse: a seemingly singular entity, which, once it has been allowed entry into the enemy’s compound, will unleash a vanquishing swarm of plurality. ... How, for example, do we interpret the fact that the undeniable powers that control commodity circulation allow for such a wide range of differences?<sup>15</sup>

He answers his question (similarly to Fisher and Mercer in that he addresses markets and commodification) by recognizing that, while visibility is often desirable, it is not neutral:

The pluralization of the commodity field does indeed allow for the acknowledgement of some things that were previously ideologically marginalized. ... However, the systems that allow for the visibility of these “acknowledgements” are not transparent: they mediate as well as circulate.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Fisher, “The Syncretic Turn: Cross-Cultural Practices in the Age of Multiculturalism,” in *New Histories*, Melina Kalinovska (curator), Lia Gangitano and Steven Nelson (editors) (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996), 35.

<sup>14</sup> See Mercer, “Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-based Blackness,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2002), 195. For more on visibility, difference, and representation, especially regarding race and ethnicity, see Herman S. Gray, *African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), especially pp. 2–4 and 77–132.

<sup>15</sup> James Currie, “Music After All,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62/1 (Spring 2009): 160.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Feminist scholars have been aware of this problem, and have addressed it in sophisticated ways. See, for example, Ruth A. Solie, “Introduction: On ‘Difference,’” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Solie, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1–20. Sally MacArthur’s grim critique of the efficacy of the feminist recuperative project is based on the problem of “difference” conferred by the label of “woman composer.” See MacArthur, *Towards a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), especially pp. 21–40. Her aim is to offer an alternative to the “hierarchical conception of difference which reduces the female composer to a negative image in relation to the male” (5).

Visibility (or audibility, in the case of the musical voices in *Maritime Rites*) is helpful in some circumstances, but it provides no certain remedy for past exclusions.

When Oliveros stands in for a silent host of other female musical experimentalists, the exceptional nature of women's presence is less frequently interrogated. In the case of improvised or performance-based experimental music from the 1980s, her singularity inaccurately masks the presence of a larger and thriving coterie of female composers.<sup>17</sup> Oliveros has written about the important role female improvising peers have played in her musical life, describing a community that contrasts starkly with the composer as rugged individualist so typical of narratives of experimental music.<sup>18</sup> Martha Mockus has also argued that Oliveros is largely presented without her strong network of peers:

Previous scholarship on Pauline Oliveros invests in a different series of overtones by locating her life and work as a disciple of John Cage and a lesser contemporary of composers Terry Riley, Lou Harrison, Gordon Mumma, and Robert Ashley. While she is often discussed in music histories of the twentieth century, she is positioned as the only woman working in experimental music.<sup>19</sup>

Again, it is important to clarify that *Maritime Rites* (1984), although reproducing a similar singularity for Oliveros, was not complicit with the scholarship cited by Mockus. Curran's lack of historical narrative in the broadcast introductions for *Maritime Rites* (especially, as noted in chapter 4, when compared to the didactic *RadioVisions*), effectively meant that *all* performers featured in the series were presented as peers and colleagues, without hierarchy. Thus the broadcasts positioned Oliveros and the other composers featured in *Maritime Rites* as

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<sup>17</sup> Important recent texts are beginning to address the imbalance. See Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner, *Women Composers and Technology in the United States* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006) and Tara Rodgers, editor, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Pauline Oliveros, "Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation," in *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 50–70. Oliveros lists profiles of numerous female improvisers who were influential for her on pp. 57–70.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Mockus, *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 3.

contemporaries of Cage, rather than as “disciples.” The challenge, then, lies in finding a way to address the fact that “Rattlesnake Mountain” effectively contains the only female voices of *Maritime Rites* (1984) without losing sight of the series’ status as radio art/musical composition (as opposed to a purposeful survey).

### **Bodies in Electroacoustic Music, Cavarero’s Sirens, and “Sonorous Articulation”**

Acousmatic listening presents a defining binary between sound and source. This mode of hearing has been inspiring for composers, and it can also produce strong effects for the listener.<sup>20</sup> Scholars have described these effects with dazzling results, and not only in the realm of electroacoustic music. Carolyn Abbate has described the power of the acousmatic in Debussy’s operas, and Michel Chion has identified the acousmatic voice as integral, for example, to the horror of Hitchcock’s film *Norman*.<sup>21</sup> Although acousmatic listening is most prevalently discussed in relation to recorded music and film (and less often in opera), with attention to the splitting properties of the technology creating the acousmatic effect, even in this context it has been traced to ancient and theatrical/liturgical origins because of the strong acousmatic potential of vocal utterance. For example, chanting and singing nuns and priests were heard from behind a

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<sup>20</sup> Composers whose music has hinged on acousmatic listening (either by attempting to split the sound from its source or by retaining its referential qualities) include Pierre Schaeffer (most famous for his work on *musique concrète*), Pierre Henry, and Luc Ferrari. Scholar Luke Windsor has argued that for the listener, “attempts to break through the acousmatic ‘screen’ in order to ascribe causation to sounds are an important facet of musical interpretation.” See Windsor, “Through and Around the Acousmatic: The Interpretation of Electroacoustic Sounds,” in *Music, electronic media, and culture*, ed. Simon Emmerson (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 9. Composer/theorist R. Murray Schafer coined the word “schizophonic” to describe the uncanny and presumably unnatural split between sound and source made possible by recording, and his sonic environmentalism is indebted to the concept. See Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> See Carolyn Abbate, “Debussy’s Phantom Sounds,” in *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 145–84, especially 148–53; and Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 129–152.



curtain in some expressions of the Christian liturgy, thus scripting the voice as the original acousmatic experience.<sup>22</sup>

While acousmatic listening need not imply voices and their “missing” bodies (indeed, it is useful for a host of sounds), it has been an especially prevalent fascination for those discussing voices.<sup>23</sup> Acousmatic listening has been an effective tool for scholars interested specifically in the relationship between voices and gendered subjectivity, as the work of Hannah Bosma and Hazel Smith shows.<sup>24</sup> Understanding that a voice need not imply any essential or coherent body, the voice becomes a sonic route for imagining a body; performed evidence of a gendered subjectivity. Electroacoustic music featuring the voice thus provides a wealth of rich examples. Yet the limit of studies based on the sound/source split, however creatively the relationship between the two halves of the binary may be imagined, has been their focus on the *singular individual* in connecting body to voice. Studies based on this binary are propelled by a notion of subjectivity that is isolated, limited by the depths of the singular mind and the borders of a singular body.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, analyses whose authors are focused on the politics of representation

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Cathy L. Cox, “Listening to Acousmatic Music” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2006), 13–14.

<sup>23</sup> Many of the early *musique concrète* pieces were studies in non-referential sounds emanating from machines and even instruments, and stemmed from Pierre Schaeffer’s work in radio. For example, of his 1948 pieces, *Etude aux Chemins de Fer* employed locomotive sounds, *Etude aux Tourniquets* used toy tops and percussion instruments, and *Etude Violette* featured manipulated recorded sounds from a piano.

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Bosma, “Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovoical Music” *Organised Sound* 8/1 (2003): 5–17. Hazel Smith, “Sonic Writing and Sonic Cross-Dressing: Gender, Language, Voice and Technology,” in *Musics and Feminisms*, ed. Sally Macarthur and Cate Poynton (Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 1999), 129–134.

<sup>25</sup> One notable exception to the voice implying a “body” is the trope of the “cyborg.” For example, Andra McCartney uses Donna Haraway’s “ironic cyborg,” which is “fashioned from both machine and organism, which Western philosophy trains us to imagine as radically separate: man and machine, nature and culture” (318). Yet this cyborg is still a singular entity implied through sonic evidence, even though this new entity embodies contradiction. See “Cyborg Experiences: Contradictions and Tensions of Technology, Nature, and the Body in Hildegard Westerkamp’s ‘Breathing Room,’” in *Music and Gender*, ed. Pirkko Moisala and Beverley Diamond, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 317–335. Another important exception is offered by Linda Dusman’s focus on the *listening* body in electroacoustic music, because it allows for plural subjectivities (including performer and listener,

(and not focusing solely on gender) have often taken the acousmatic relationship between performers and their electroacoustic representation as the basis for their critiques; a fruitful approach that focuses on the unique qualities of voices, but one still based on the singular voice/body split. This approach is also evident in scholarship on famous (political) pieces using voices.<sup>26</sup>

Adriana Cavarero offers an alternative to the singular acousmatic by theorizing the sounding voice as a relational technology, always implying communication and thus multiple subjectivities. According to Cavarero, these subjectivities are unique, and should not be generalized to construct a larger category of abstracted “Voice.” Her work suggests that voices require and always imply listeners. Cavarero’s attention to the myth of the Sirens is part of her larger politico-philosophical exploration of the voice as a marker of identity: unique, yet always relational. Speech is central to this voiced identity because it is “contingent,” “contextual,” and “destined for the ears of another.”<sup>27</sup> What is at stake for Cavarero is the undesirable universalizing tendencies of Western philosophy, especially that focused on Voice—tendencies that erase the uniqueness of the voice in favor of a theoretical, generalized speech that is

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and the mediating presence of the composer). Dusman, “No Bodies There: Absence and Presence in Acousmatic Performance,” in *Music and Gender*, ed. Pirkko Moisala and Beverly Diamond (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 336–345.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Mitchell Morris, “Musical Virtues” in *Beyond Structural Listening?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing*, ed. Andrew Dell’Antonio (Berkeley: University of California Press), 61–64; Lloyd Whitesell, “White Noise: Race and Erasure in the Cultural Avant-Garde” *American Music* 19/2 (Summer 2001): 176–177; Sumanth Gopinath, “The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich’s *Come Out*,” and “Contraband children: The politics of race and liberation in the music of Steve Reich, 1965–1966” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2005), 5–7 and 20–74; Cecilia J.-X. Sun, “Experiments in Musical Performance: Historiography, Politics, and the Post-Cagian Avant-garde” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2004), especially p. 120; and Eric Hung, “Defining Art Music in Great Britain, 1955–1975” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2003), 131–145.

<sup>27</sup> Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 14.

“separated from speakers and finds its home in thought.”<sup>28</sup> She argues that it is not sufficient to retroactively throw the focus back onto sonority, bodily pleasure, or the “grain of the voice” at the expense of language.<sup>29</sup> Instead, “the metaphysical machine, which methodically negates the primacy of the voice over speech, should be dismantled by transforming this primacy into an essential destination.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, speech is the destination of bodily sound; we should listen for sonorous, envoiced language that is always a relational expression between unique individuals.

The Siren in particular is important to Cavarero because her character provides an example of a female voice with a shifting relationship between (too often solely male) language and (too-often solely female) sonic utterance (that is, pure voice without semantic code), thus demonstrating one problem with a generalized notion of voice. Cavarero presents a genealogy of the Siren figure from Homer to the twenty-first century. She explains that Homer’s Sirens were much different from their fishy descendants.<sup>31</sup> They were not beautiful mermaids at all—in fact, they were terribly ugly creatures (half bird instead of fish) whose seductive capabilities were invested in their voices, not their curvy appearances. Most importantly, they did not vocalize

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 9. Jacques Derrida is her primary target. See her critique (and recognition) of Derrida’s work on voice in “Appendix: Dedicated to Derrida,” in *For More Than One Voice*, 213–241.

<sup>29</sup> Cavarero appreciates Roland Barthes’s focus on the materiality of the voice and its relationship to the body, but she argues that his mistake is in neglecting to write about “a body whose singularity is foregrounded, nor of a voice whose uniqueness is given any importance.” She suggests that Barthes writes of body and voice as general categories of “depersonalized pleasure in which the embodied uniqueness of each existent is simply dissolved along with the general categories of the subject and the individual.” Ibid., 15. See also Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Steven Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179–189.

<sup>30</sup> Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to Cavarero’s description, see the overview in Inna Naroditskaya and Linda Phyllis Austern, “Introduction: Singing Each to Each,” in *Music of the Sirens*, ed. Austern and Naroditskaya (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1–15. In the same collection, Leofranc Holford-Strevens gives a more detailed, fascinating account of how much Sirens changed over the course of the Middle Ages. See Holford-Strevens, “Sirens in Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” in *Music of the Sirens*, ed. Linda Phyllis Austern and Inna Naroditskaya (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 16–51.

enticing, wordless melodies; their songs had intelligible words and told stories. Cavarero argues that through time, the “western imagination” stripped Sirens of their linguistic capabilities, and that this loss of language was a controlling gesture. While Homer’s Sirens were omniscient narrators, telling Odysseus of his own feats and capitalizing on his pride, the modern Siren embodies “the lethality of a pure, harmonious, powerful, and irresistible voice that is almost like an animal cry.”<sup>32</sup> In Cavarero’s reading of Homer, the “entire pathos [of the Sirens] is concentrated on the deadly, seductive circuit between voice and hearing, sound and ear.”<sup>33</sup> But more than this: in Homer’s *Odyssey*, the voice/sound is inseparable from language. In other words, Odysseus wanted to hear not only the tempting voice, but also “*the tale that it sings*.”<sup>34</sup> It is not only that language was an important component of the voices the Sirens, but also that their language was destined for the ears of another.

### Hearing the Sirens in “Rattlesnake Mountain”

In “Rattlesnake Mountain,” I become a listening mariner as I am surrounded by the oceanic sounds of Curran’s audio collage. McLean’s speech fades in and out. As I strain to hear the continuation of her phrases, I am disappointed that their beginnings and ends are just beyond audibility, always promising more information. I am lost amidst the maritime ambient sounds of waves, sea birds, and (from my landlubber perspective) meaningless yet lovely navigational signals. I also feel drawn to the familiar musical structures of Oliveros’s accordion solo. For me, her instrumental solo is somehow vaguely informative (utilizing recognizable consonant

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<sup>32</sup> Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 103.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 105. Italics mine.

harmonies), while the information-rich nautical cues remain exotic to my experience. As a listening musical mariner, I find myself prioritizing the “distraction” of McLean’s stories and Oliveros’s music through the navigationally more relevant sounds: the Siren voices (musical and linguistic) of Oliveros and McLean become spoken and performed sonic lures that promise meaning while the crucial navigational sounds become musical.

The segment begins with a chiming gong, and McLean’s voice commences immediately, accompanied softly by waves and birds:

See, being here, I control two different fog signals, but I don’t have to listen to either one of them. If I really try hard I can hear them. I have to step outside...very quiet and still, and I get this faint, [sung] “tinnggg.” To me it’s wonderful, but, to the people right next door, it might be different.<sup>35</sup>

McLean’s speech refers to the ambient sounds included in the piece, though in their functional rather than musical roles. When McLean first refers to the “two different fog signals,” Curran includes the distinct, pure tones of two signals, roughly D4 and G4 (from a whistle buoy near Robinson’s Rock, Nova Scotia), sounding a perfect fourth apart (see Example 5.1). The attacks are separated in time by less than one second, so they overlap and resonate together as a hollow consonance. These pitches repeat intermittently, and form a rhythmically irregular pitched drone that will eventually be integrated into the musical material of Oliveros’s accordion solo.

The correspondence between McLean’s description of two distinct sounds and the audible inclusion of two distinct whistles means that I am effectively drawn into the sonic space; it sounds as if McLean is referring to these specific signals. Thus I hear what she hears, and her voice becomes a reference point in the fog of ambient sound that we both occupy. This effect is amplified by Curran’s inclusion of a sharp gong sound directly accompanying McLean’s

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<sup>35</sup> Transcribed from “Rattlesnake Mountain.”

onomatopoeic “tinnggg.” Also present from the outset are the percussive clangs of a three-toned gong from the Graves in Camden Harbor, Penobscot Bay, Maine. The Graves are a craggy stretch of rocks approximately one mile from Camden, and they present a hazard for mariners planning to enter the harbor.<sup>36</sup> This dangerous stretch of rock is protected by a lighted gong buoy on the east. The gongs of this buoy sound almost like strong wind chimes, following no discernable underlying pulse. Their three tones are closest to C4, D4, and E4, with D4 and E4 clanging much more frequently than C4.<sup>37</sup> McLean’s sung “tinnggg” in the opening strain suggests that she may be referring to this gong buoy, and yet Curran’s imaginative depiction makes it impossible to determine what sound she is actually describing (furthermore, gong buoys sound erratically, their musical mechanism usually propelled by the strength of the waves they ride).

The piece begins by establishing aural perspective, as McLean describes the maritime sounds both from her position and the position of other listeners. She is responsible for the sounds, yet she can barely hear them (“See, being here, I control two different fog signals, but I don’t have to listen to either one of them”). Her phrase “being here” emphasizes being in a specific place. McLean imagines that some might even dislike the navigational sounds; residents within earshot may find them loud or repetitively distracting (“To me it’s wonderful, but, to the people right next door...it might be different”).

Then, the listener is left to absorb the fabricated sonic space that Curran has constructed out of his collected sounds. McLean’s initial spoken phrase ends, leaving only the ambient

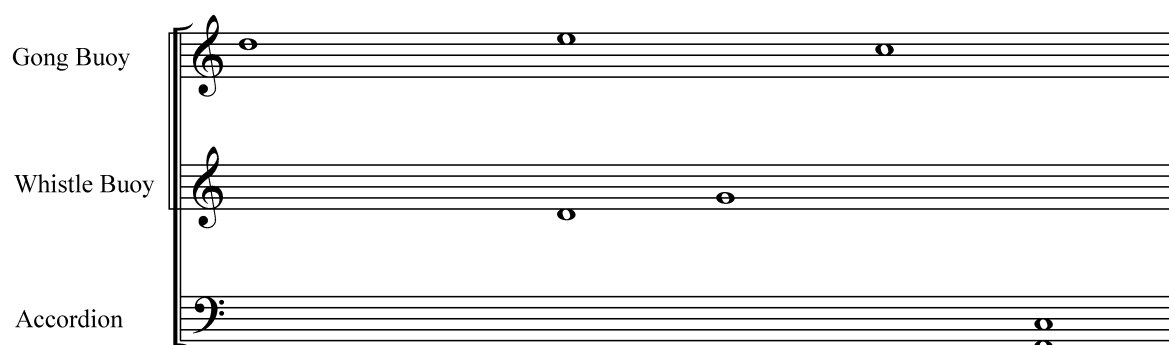
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<sup>36</sup> See for example, practical information on The Graves at Camden Harbor available to amateur small vessel operators at <http://cic.oceancruisingclub.org/reports/377-camden-harbor-penobscot-bay-maine> and <http://me.usharbors.com/harbor-guide/camden-harbor>.

<sup>37</sup> This does not necessarily depict the actual pattern of the buoy, as Curran may have isolated and recombined the three tones. All sounds—while drawn from real-world sources—were filtered through Curran’s artistic subjectivity.

sounds—waves, a passing seagull—still punctuated by the recurring perfect fourth from the whistle buoy. Slowly, and about one minute into the piece, the first bass strains of *Rattlesnake Mountain* grow into the texture so gradually that no attack is audible (F3 and C3). The resulting cluster of tones consists of a perfect fifth (the accordion), the perfect fourth of the whistle buoy, and the whole steps of the gong buoy in the middle. Example 5.1 shows the most prominent pitches during the first two minutes of the segment.

**Example 5.1: Initial Pitches and Order of Attack, Pitched Navigational Signals and Accordion**



At first, the toggling D4 and G4 of the whistle buoy sound like scale degrees  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{1}$  to me, an ascending fourth from the dominant that tonicizes the G4. The corresponding D4 of the gong buoy and its lighter E4 (scale degree  $\hat{6}$  in this hearing) heighten this perception for me. As the reedy bass of the accordion enters, however, my perspective changes: now F sounds like a “home” because of its low, fundamental status. I hear these fifths and fourths as familiar intervals in pastoral music, and as they are layered in, they reflect the expansive oceanic space heard in the ambient sounds.

The sustained pitches of the whistle buoy and accordion are timbres that result from moving air—the wind in the case of the buoy, or the slow pumping of Oliveros’s arms in the case of the accordion. Thus the presence of “breath”—as moving air—is prevalent throughout the piece. The pitches of the navigational signals remain constant as the piece proceeds, but Oliveros’s sustained chords on the accordion shift ever so slowly. From this shifting harmonic fog (still accompanied by ambient ocean sounds), Oliveros subtly begins to ornament her chord changes with a mordent-like gestures. These tiny flourishes initiate an escalating yet unhurried series of fluty, scalar runs on the accordion. Oliveros’s scalar patterns sound like interjections; they represent virtuosic performed intention in the midst of droning simplicity. Example 5.2 shows the range of the first of these virtuosic runs beginning at 3:09 in the piece. It is comprised of the white keys on the accordion, and changes directions several times, as if Oliveros is running her fingers or knuckles up and down the accordion’s keyboard. Because of the boundaries of the collection, the pattern has a modal, dorian sound (a common modality for sea chanteys and folk songs).

**Example 5.2: Pitch Collection for Fluty Accordion Run, 3:09 to 3:14**



Beginning approximately four minutes into the piece, I can hear—as if located behind the music of Oliveros’s accordion and the ambient sounds—unintelligible whispers, with McLean’s percussive and sibilant consonants (ch, sh, t, s) the only audible element. The whispers sporadically crescendo to reveal comprehensible phrases, mirroring the virtuosic accordion runs.



This is how I hear Curran setting McLean's voice to beckon from within the fog, offering phrases that are tantalizingly incomplete and fading away as soon as they threaten to be overheard.

It is during this section that Curran briefly includes a reference to motherhood, which brings gender to the foreground again. The following snippet is audible: "...then I can't just hand my child off to my husband or babysitter and say, 'he has a doctor's appointment next month,'" McLean's inflection sounds like she is beginning a list of instructions for caring for her little one during her extended absence, though her sentence quickly recedes before the second item begins. It is unclear whether this is a real or hypothetical absence related to McLean's work, yet the statement's ambiguity adds an imaginative richness related to her gender. If a listener didn't hear the higher pitch of her voice culturally marking her as female, such a statement provides a further claim of gendered identity as she contemplates caring for her son and finding caretakers for him. This is the only mention of McLean's personal life during "Rattlesnake Mountain," as the other briefly audible statements refer only to her position as lighthouse keeper and to the experience of being at sea.

The second collection of audible sentences is repeated and fragmented, assembled from the following:

Well, [sigh] when you're at sea...in the fog, and ... basically the only thing you have to rely on is your radar...and your fog signals... you're only mainly relying on the radar, which is electronic. It can fail. But when you hear that fog signal, you know you can trust it. You can trust that...the way it's supposed to be...and all the signals are different.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Transcribed from "Rattlesnake Mountain."

McLean's tone is matter-of-fact and confident when she says, "you know you can trust it." This halting narrative, with interjected phrases restored (more on this below), becomes a refrain repeated at the end of the piece.

After McLean's description of signals, Oliveros's fluty runs and still solid drone gradually crescendo to overtake the texture of the piece. For approximately one and a half minutes (around 7:50 to 9:20), the accordion is completely in the foreground. The gong buoy sounds like faint percussion in the background; the whistle buoy like an accompanying flute. If I were tuning into the radio and catching this minute and a half excerpt, I would hear only music; that is, the referential qualities of the ambient sounds are obscured without the surrounding context of the piece. Here, Curran uses Oliveros's musical language to absorb the navigational signals into a different context. This is also the loudest and densest portion of the piece.

Gradually, the accordion chords decrescendo and McLean repeats her spoken refrain on the fog signals, this time with a brief interjection (represented in italics below) that Curran did not include the first time. I include the entire quote for context:

Well, [sigh] when you're at sea....in the fog, and ... basically the only thing you have to rely on is your radar...and your fog signals...*you can't put a value on that...if they're not there*, you're only mainly relying on the radar, which is electronic. It can fail. But when you hear that fog signal, you know you can trust it. You can trust that...the way it's supposed to be...and all the signals are different.<sup>39</sup>

It is as if Curran has played with the referential qualities of the ambient sounds and the impenetrable nature of the accordion sound to depict the lack of orientation described by McLean. The piece ends with only ambient ocean sounds and navigational sounds. Both Oliveros's accordion and McLean's voice vanish.

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<sup>39</sup> Transcribed from "Rattlesnake Mountain."

It is within the context of real-world sounds and directional unfamiliarity that McLean's and Oliveros's spoken and musical utterances become Siren song for me. McLean speaks a language I can comprehend. Like Homer's Sirens, her sound is not pure sonicity, but carries knowledge and meaning; even omniscient knowledge, in the sense that she knows what mariners do not know—where threatening obstacles lie. In actuality, McLean's role as officer in the Coast Guard and lighthouse keeper means that her purposes are the opposite of the Sirens: her utterances are charitable, not deceiving. She does not lure mariners to meet their doom; rather, she warns them and guides them away from danger. Rather, it is Curran's setting that repositions her voice as distraction in relation to the navigational signals. Curran's setting of the navigational signals reinserts metaphorical risk to the scenario because it washes these real-world sounds of their protective purpose. His audio collage transforms informative, crucial signals into musical tones and timbres, torn from the physical dangers they warn of and re-presented for listening pleasure.<sup>40</sup> In Homer's story, the bonds that hold Odysseus to the mast allow him to experience the Siren's songs in safety. In this case, it is the imagination-inducing medium of radio that brings (for me) unfamiliar sounds and constructed spaces to my listening space without the dangers of hearing these signals at sea.

For Judith Peraino, Odysseus's harrowing experience with the Sirens (he listens while tightly bound to the ship's mast) is "relatively harmless" for a similar reason to the one I describe above.<sup>41</sup> She explains that even though the encounter does seem to set off a very pitiable chain of misfortunes for Odysseus, it is harmless because it is solitary (only he can hear the voices),

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<sup>40</sup> This risk is why I hear the women as Sirens in this piece, rather than as the figure of the woman as "port in a storm." Nonetheless, the second trope could yield a valuable and different reading of the piece that would emphasize the gendered voices' inviting qualities and McLean's sampled speech on "trust."

<sup>41</sup> Judith A. Peraino, *Listing to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 19.

policeable (he is free to listen, paradoxically, because his bonds protect him), and musical (encoded). For her, the story is about how “Odysseus, while assuming he can control his transgression, gives in to a sexualized self-curiosity and, importantly, a desire to become otherwise, to question and to be questionable, to risk self-obliteration in music.”<sup>42</sup> As Curran musicalizes the whistle and gong buoys, their purpose is obliterated through Oliveros’s musical expression. McLean’s explanatory sentences promise the trustworthiness of the signals, and yet this description contrasts starkly with Curran’s creative juxtaposition, where the difference and specific nature of the navigational signals are erased. Thus McLean’s Siren voice is permitted the destination of language—it tells the story of guidance and help, yet its very presence corresponds to ostensibly helpful navigational signals that are stripped to sonicity.

McLean’s voice speaks not only of her experiences, but also to imagined mariners and real listeners. She represents her gender and her profession (as the “only female lighthouse keeper”) as her voice calls from an imagined location that Curran compiled from multiple real-world coastal sources. Her articulation is sonic and musical within the piece, but it is tied to linguistic expression and always moves toward that intention. Paired with Oliveros’s improvisation, Curran’s setting makes the navigational signals musical.

## Conclusion

The enticing promise of communication offered by “Rattlesnake Mountain” is mirrored in its medium: radio. An electronic signal, traveling imperceptibly through space, reaches a receiver that makes it audible to human ears. The radio signal gestures toward its eventual listener, while simultaneously pointing back to its sender. For the listener—even an unintended

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 18.

or accidental listener—the broadcast signal emanates an aura of presence.<sup>43</sup> It projects the existence of its sender to the existing listener.

Much like the radio waves that broadcast their sounds, the musical foghorns in *Maritime Rites* (1984) have a communicative promise for their listeners. In the foghorns' original, functional context, their sound travels to listeners who navigate their position based on the signal. The foghorns transmit an aura of benevolent presence. One lighthouse keeper interviewed for *Maritime Rites* explained this presence in grateful terms:

People that are land-bound and never get to sea, they only look at the sound signals as irritants, noise pollution, something that they could live without. But when you're out there in the fog and you're completely encased with visibility [of] ten–fifteen feet, when you hear that sound signal, you really know that you have a friend out there in the fog.<sup>44</sup>

In *Maritime Rites* (1984), the listener was not presented with sound as a marker for a body; rather, they were invited to imagine a musico-geographical context for communication based on the speaker's voice(s) and other referential sounds in the piece. This allowed for a rich, shifting metaphorical connection between spoken voice and composed/improvised/performed musical voice, as outlined in chapter 4.

*Maritime Rites* explored sonic signals (foghorns) as audible evidence of relationality. Though the signals were presented for aesthetic contemplation, the testimonies of the speakers remind the listener of the communicative properties that the signals might have in a different context. The sounds of foghorns and whistle buoys are incorporated into performed

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<sup>43</sup> Here I am conceiving of “aura” as Jonathan Sterne does in his reading of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” According to Sterne, Benjamin’s aura is *not* an irreproducible, given property of presence, but, rather, “the object of a nostalgia that accompanies reproduction.” In other words, “the very construct of aura is, by and large, retroactive, something that is an artifact of reproducibility.” See Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 220.

<sup>44</sup> Senior Coast Guard Chief Daniel Warrington, transcribed from the 2004 CD release of the 1985 broadcast. For more on Warrington’s post at Cape Cod, see Alvin Curran and Melissa Gould, “Program Note,” *Maritime Rites* (New World Records, 80625-2).

improvisations, but the speakers continue to refer to the sounds in a way that marks their function as warning signals even as the dangers they warn of become safe to ignore.

This hearing of “Rattlesnake Mountain” is meant to complicate the way that pre-recorded voices generate “authenticity” in experimental music. Instead of relying solely on an implied, coherent bodily source, this piece throws the focus onto the voice itself as communicative practice. How might the listener position him/herself in relation to the stories and musical voices of the segment? The relevant question is no longer, “what does the voice say about the person/body who performed the recorded material,” but what communicative intention and relationship is conveyed through the (recorded) articulation (linguistic or not)? Voices become part of a relational network: ineffable communications (like the radio waves upon which they travel) emanating from and received by real bodies; related to, yet not determined by them. The voices are intentional signals that are received as well as emitted, making audible the constant sonic negotiations that construct notions of identity.

## CONCLUSION

NPR entered the 1990s as a mainstream news institution, continuing to garner awards and build its reputation for excellence in journalism.<sup>1</sup> In spite of NPR's increasing orientation toward news and information, the institution's public characterization revealed its debt to the identity forged in the late 1960s and 1970s, holding strong to its creative and progressive roots.<sup>2</sup> Ralph Engelman explains that the legacy of NPR's early days endured because "the institutional growth of NPR paralleled the success of *All Things Considered*," its inaugural program that had been created by Siemering.<sup>3</sup> As recently as 2010, a retrospective volume published by NPR boasted about the institution's unconventional character, its prominent representation of diversity, and its continued commitment to the arts—all of which echoed the goals put forth in NPR's "Purposes" in 1970.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, whether these elements truly described the bulk of the

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<sup>1</sup> For more on NPR's journalism in the early 1990s, see Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 107–114; Michael P. McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs of National Public Radio* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 82–84; and Jack W. Mitchell, *Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 135–144.

<sup>2</sup> McCauley writes that in 1994, NPR's president Delano Lewis told the *New York Times* that his three biggest goals were "to get more financial support from corporations that did business in areas that NPR News covered; to create new program genres; and to attract new listeners, especially minorities and young people." McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 86. The second and third goals resonated directly with Siemering's "Purposes." In spite of NPR's success with hard news, the institution remained committed to new program genres and audience diversity.

<sup>3</sup> Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 108.

<sup>4</sup> See *This is NPR* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010). For example, Vivian Schiller (president and CEO of NPR in 2009) insists, "NPR is no ordinary media company." She quotes Siemering's directive that NPR will promote "the exchange of ideas between people with different values," and reaffirms NPR's commitment to "cover the sciences and the arts with rigor and imagination" (258). Dick Meyer (executive editor, NPR News and Information) describes NPR's increased presence on the internet in terms similar to NPR's first hiring steps, using "the simple NPR recipe": "hire talented, independent-minded journalists and technologists and let them loose" (265). And Steve Inskeep (senior host, *Morning Edition*) waxes poetic about NPR's populist character as defined by potential listeners when describing the night hours required to

network's programming or not, they had become integral parts of the NPR "brand."<sup>5</sup> For some, this branding and concurrent growth was a betrayal of NPR's early ideals. Steve Rathe, however, viewed the institution's new stature positively, with its brand as a fulfillment of mission: "As NPR attained real recognition, some key staff people seemed defensive—more concerned with holding on to insider status than pursuing the kind of aggressive journalism and catalytic cultural role that some of us who were at NPR in its early years had envisioned."<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, though Rathe was directly responsible for a number of early NPR programs that would likely *not* have been welcomed within the context of NPR's later dedication to news programming, he still expressed hope for NPR's "catalytic cultural role," which would be realized by the more powerful institution.

Rathe's evaluation provides a refreshing contrast to those voices lamenting NPR's current state.<sup>7</sup> Although I have argued for increased attention to important and neglected musical programs from earlier in NPR's existence, this dissertation is not a ballad of what could have been. Neither is it a revisionist history of NPR. Instead, I have hoped to provide a supplemental and complementary account of programs produced during a different time at NPR. NPR's cultural programming has attracted little attention, in part

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produce a daily news magazine: "We don't get a lot of sleep, but we can take pride in that. Somewhere in America a woman is brewing coffee at 7-Eleven, while an autoworker is finishing the night shift. A farmer is awake; a bartender is stacking chairs. A student is trying to get an online degree. An insomniac poet is hacking away at the keyboard all night like a latter-day Charles Bukowski. A soldier is lacing his boots. For those of us at *Morning Edition*, it's an honor to be awake along with them" (254).

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell notes that a "tolerance for diversity contributed to listeners' affection for public radio. Such tolerance did not mean, however, that listeners actually tuned in to the polka programs [his example of a diverse program]." Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> Engelman *Public Radio and Television*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> For one of the most scathing criticisms of NPR's state at the end of the twentieth century, see Tom McCourt, *Conflicting Communication Interests in America: The Case of National Public Radio* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).



because it does not fit into NPR's current programming priorities. The examples of *Radio Net*, *RadioVisions*, and *Maritime Rites* (1984) display the multifaceted nature of NPR's earlier programming, and together they reveal how NPR played a role in shaping new American music.

None of these shows, however, should be interpreted as representative of any *coherent* approach to new music at NPR during any given time period. Smaller programs on new music (similar to *Maritime Rites*) were presented frequently during the institution's early years, and there was no official declaration that NPR would automatically reject extensive new music programming after the mid-1980s. In other words, while each of these show's gestation and production become intelligible within the context of NPR's institutional history, none of them should be read as *solely* the result of that institutional context. As a corporate entity, NPR exists as the sum of multiple, messy, and human professional, personal, and legislative relationships and conflicts. This is the model of multiple agencies I sought to reproduce in writing about these three shows. I have emphasized the shows' roots in musical practices unrelated to NPR's history—for example, detailing *Radio Net*'s origins in Neuhaus's *Public Supply* pieces, emphasizing *RadioVisions*'s use of existing works, and discussing Curran's live versions of *Maritime Rites*—while showing NPR's significant role in making their broadcasts possible (and ideally profitable for the institution's growth). A large cast of people came together (directly and indirectly) to create these three broadcasts of experimental music: influential figures in NPR's founding, radio producers (those employed by NPR, as well as independent producers), composers, performers, music historians (present most notably in *RadioVisions* commentary), and radio hosts at local stations. NPR's structure,

institutional history, and culture were relevant as these actors sought to present new music to a national audience.

### **Public Radio and New Music**

This dissertation suggests multiple avenues for further research, based both on the archival sources presented and the particular arguments I have advanced. First, the archives of public broadcasting at the University of Maryland as well as numerous audio archives online (Ubuweb, RadiOm) are littered with traces of public radio's stellar programs on new music. Public radio broadcasting has received very limited discussion in musicological literature, a fact that is both unfortunate and somewhat surprising given the large amount of new music broadcast by public stations. Not only did local stations and independent producers commission new works, but they also promoted performances through advertising and announcements, and they invited composers and performers to speak as guests. Exploring the work of specific stations, individual producers' work across networks and stations, or independent production companies would also be logical ways to organize a study.

NPR itself may seem like a less likely candidate for further study because its forays into commissioning new music were scattered and inconsistent, especially as compared to those in the broader world of public radio. Yet although NPR's new music programs were less common in the grand scope of its output, they were still abundant, and offer rich subject material for musicological study. Rathe's "The Gentle Pioneer," a one-hour program that became the pilot for *RadioVisions* provides a case in point. Moreover, the Satellite Program Development Fund (SPDF) enabled numerous radio

broadcasts of new music. Table 4.1 in chapter 4 includes fourteen examples of SPDF programs dedicated to new music and audio art. A comprehensive study of programs funded by the SPDF would not only reveal the substance and histories of these shows, but could also trace these programs' broadcast through multiple public radio institutions (recall that, though funded by the SPDF, the completed programs were not NPR products).

### **The “Listeners”**

One of the central arguments advanced by my chapters on *RadioVisions* hinged on the existence of “imaginary listeners” guiding programming decisions, and this argument could be fruitfully pursued in other research on NPR's development and presentation of music programs. This shadowy presence is not unique to this dissertation; a mass haunting by “the listeners” is palpable in scholarship on NPR, especially that detailing NPR's reliance on audience response data. Researching new music programming on public radio through actual, documented listening practices has exciting potential, especially for scholars using a primarily ethnographic approach. Yet the determining role of imaginary listeners has been equally fascinating, and a study of their projection could offer additional insight into programming practices at NPR.

Though NPR's listeners have been conjured from hard audience response data and the listening practices of real individuals, they became ghostly through their generalization and absorption into NPR's programming deliberations. The existing data retained by NPR is highly processed into categories designed to help the institutions, and with the exception of a few valuable instances where stations directly quoted listeners'

responses to programs, it is difficult to find raw data in NPR's archives.<sup>8</sup> This is one reason that I could not depict NPR's "real" audience when discussing *RadioVisions*; instead, I focused on the way NPR's imagined listeners informed the creation and production of musical broadcasts. This reliance on "listeners" and audience building is commonly discussed in NPR scholarship, and is not limited to NPR's programming on new music. Pursuing the relationship between NPR's *many* musical endeavors (of all styles and genres) and its audience building techniques would provide a broader picture of the institution's use of music.

NPR began significant audience research almost immediately after it was founded: in 1973, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting began giving public radio stations ratings information from Arbitron (the leading radio research company).<sup>9</sup> More intensive audience research began in 1979, when David Giovannoni designed the Public Radio Audience Profile (PRAP) for NPR, research carried out during the same years that *RadioVisions* was developed, recorded, and broadcast. This was also a time when the commercial notion of radio "formats" was coming to the fore in public radio, largely championed at NPR by programming president (under Mankiewicz) Sam Holt.<sup>10</sup> Holt was also an influential figure in public radio and NPR's founding. In 1985, Giovannoni published "Public Radio Listeners: Supporters and Non-Supporters," which found,

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<sup>8</sup> One alternative approach might be to pursue data on NPR's listeners through major radio ratings services, rather than relying on NPR's interpretation of the data, or approach individual stations for feedback from their own audiences.

<sup>9</sup> McCauley, *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 101. Mitchell labels the biggest supporters of the argument for using formats in public radio (Larry Lichty, David Giovannoni, George Bailey, and Tom Church) as "the disciples of audience growth through formatting," and argues that they were ultimately successful in promoting their message. On the main commercial (music) formats that were dominant in the 1970s, as well as their cultural power derived from grouping audience segments and defining genre, see Kim Simpson, *Early '70s Radio: The American Format Revolution* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2011).

among other things, that “a station’s programming—especially its news and information programming—was the most powerful factor in explaining why these listeners actually chose to make financial contributions.”<sup>11</sup> Then, in 1988, Giovannoni’s independent firm produced another and even larger study of public radio audiences known as “Audience 88” using the best market-segmentation software available. The conclusions of this study directly contradicted the construction of audience depicted in NPR’s “Purposes.”<sup>12</sup>

“Audience 88” showed that public radio only actually served one particular segment of the American radio audience, notably “those who were highly educated and socially conscious and who, in most cases, enjoyed a mix of high-quality information programming and classical music”<sup>13</sup> contradicting the notion that NPR’s programming would offer something for everyone (regardless of age, class, race, and ethnicity).<sup>14</sup> It is intriguing that classical music listeners were strongly associated with the NPR brand, and pursuing this association could yield useful insights about classical music broadcasting practices. More than simply reiterating class associations with classical music in the mid- and late twentieth century (though NPR’s success with classical music listeners surely has much to reveal about that connection), such a study could pursue classical listening practices as mediated by radio; analyze and interpret playlists and the broadcast

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<sup>11</sup> McCauley, paraphrasing “Public Radio Listeners,” *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Mitchell provides clear analysis of “Audience 88,” including how it resonated with the institution’s mission statement, in *Listener Supported*, 145–147.

<sup>13</sup> McCauley, summarizing “Audience 88,” *NPR: The Trials and Triumphs*, 80. “Audience 98,” produced ten years later, was much larger, and again contradicted many truisms of public radio broadcasting, suggesting that NPR’s core listeners valued news over classical music, and preferred the national programming over local programming.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell refers to this as the “disturbing concept put forth by Giovanonni”: “that success for public radio meant having great appeal to a subset of the population and none at all to the vast majority of the population. Whatever the pragmatic wisdom of this conclusion, it was far from what Lord Reith [BBC], Lew Hill [Pacifica], or Bill Siemering had in mind.” Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 134.

repertoires of various stations; and offer insight about the cultural prestige of “classical music” as formulated by NPR.

Michael Warner’s work on the notion of a “public” helps to illuminate the relationship between NPR’s audience and its programming.<sup>15</sup> Warner defines a public as “a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself,” insisting that a public “exists by virtue of being addressed.”<sup>16</sup> He argues against any public simply as a quantifiable entity, insisting that publics are circular entities that exist only in relation to the discourse that creates them. For Warner, a public is not rational discussion or persuasion; it is poesis. Warner’s work describes the relationship between NPR’s programming and its desired listeners with uncanny accuracy. It also weaves the role of NPR’s (imagined) public into the material of its programs. Warner’s theory can account for the circularity Jack Mitchell describes in the relationship between public radio creators and listeners. Mitchell writes:

When public radio producers created programs that represented their personal values and interests, which is what they had traditionally done, they were creating programs that appealed to the people who shared their ‘values and lifestyles.’ ... *Audience 88* and its primary researcher, David Giovannoni, now delivered the happy, but not really surprising, news that the “societally conscious” core listeners drawn to public radio were pretty much the same kind of people who worked in public radio.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005). A significant body of writing on NPR has dealt with the “public” of public radio, especially as related to the problem of defining a “public sphere.” For brief discussion of the impact of Jürgen Habermas’s work on American public media, see Engelman, *Public Radio and Television*, 6–8. See also in-depth discussion in Thomas Michael McCourt, *National Public Radio and the Rationalization of the Public* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996). These studies attempt to deal with “publics” made up of a collection of individuals (the addressees), but Warner’s radical reformulation that puts the construction of a public in the hands of the addresser could greatly enrich this approach. See also Jamie M. Litty, *Audience, Relevance, Sound: Meaning Structures and Structuring Meaning in Public Radio Journalism* (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 67.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 133.

Given Warner's formulation, this conclusion suggests that a public was being constructed through the programming created for it.

Mitchell presents this information in his chapter on *Performance Today*, an NPR program designed to become the musical equivalent of *Morning Edition*.<sup>18</sup> He concludes, "that it [*Performance Today*] failed exemplifies both public radio's problems in doing cultural programming and the environment into which NPR introduced it, during the presidency of Doug Bennet in the late 1980s when the two versions of *Weekend Edition* went on the air."<sup>19</sup> Mitchell also accuses *Performance Today* of becoming a "vanilla program," with minimal discussion of what this meant musically. Examining the actual musical content of *Performance Today* in relationship to the listener response data guiding its development, as I have done in the case of *RadioVisions*, could provide a more detailed account than Mitchell's and reveal much about NPR's use of music in the 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

NPR's imagined listeners remain important for further research on NPR and its relationship to music as it enters a twenty-first-century media environment. For example, NPR has developed a website devoted to music, as well as several newly minted music

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<sup>18</sup> Though the program is no longer owned or produced by NPR, was transferred to their competitor American Public Media in January of 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> Notably, in research that argued against the appeal of *Performance Today*, audience researcher George Bailey "did not create a list of popular compositions or recommend music in traditional categories like Baroque or Romantic. Instead he identified 'sounds' that appealed to NPR news listeners based on tempo, density, and instrumentation. He called these sounds 'modes' of classical music and the overall concept 'modal music.'" Mitchell, *Listener Supported*, 126. The implication is that *Performance Today* did not supply these "modes," but it is not clear from Mitchell's work how the show may have neglected them.

blogs, including “All Songs Considered.”<sup>21</sup> Their website and blogs supply easy access to the institution’s recent use and curation of musical styles and genres. Homing in on NPR and musical experimentalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s provided helpful focus for this dissertation, yet my research has revealed that there are many more opportunities for approaching the relationships between music at NPR, the institution’s commitment to growth through audience research, and its imaginary listeners.

### **American Experimentalism’s “Renegade Tradition” Revisited**

A close study of the radio programs discussed in this dissertation demonstrates that in order to understand American experimentalism more fully, scholars must attend to disparate institutions, and not only traditional musical venues—for example, events at galleries, festivals, lofts, pubs, colleges, and, of course, radio stations provided important opportunities for defining experimentalism. The case studies in this dissertation demonstrate that the category of “experimental music” has been molded, in part, by mainstream radio broadcasts, and thus challenge the all-too-common exclusion of popular culture from scholarship on experimental music. Many recent papers, dissertations, and books demonstrate that scholars are thinking creatively and holistically about experimentalism’s wide ranging existence in the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The website is titled “NPR Music: New Music, Music Reviews and Music News,” <http://www.npr.org/music/>. The blog “All Songs Considered” is available at <http://www.npr.org/blogs/allsongs/>, along with four other blogs on music hosted by NPR.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Ryan Dohoney, “Recalling the Voice of Julius Eastman,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, November, 2009; Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Caroline Polk O’Meara, *New York Noise: Music in the Post-Industrial City, 1978–1985* (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2006).



In the pursuit of a more thorough and complicated telling of American experimentalism's construction, this dissertation has also revealed a contradictory element: strong forces have tethered experimentalism to its "Other" of traditional concert music. Experimental music has retained the cultural prestige associated with the very canon of "mainstream" concert music that it has been set against. Piekut has noted the prevalence of this phenomenon, and provides the example of scholarship meant to prove Cage's importance as more than a philosopher as creating continuities with the Western European tradition.<sup>23</sup> Piekut also explains that although Cage's work has radical potential, through the production of scores, among other methods, "Cage folded his output very easily into the conventional concert-music tradition, where it was later taken up by willing performers."<sup>24</sup> In the case of *RadioVisions*, such a paradox—where experimentalism retained the cultural prestige of concert music while ostensibly rejecting the constraints of that music—was amply evident in the show's narration. Schuller's commentary emphasized both the history of Western Art Music as well as this new music's departure from that tradition. Similarly, the advertisements for and reviews of Neuhaus's *Radio Net* stressed the piece's status as "music," a move seemingly designed to place the radical piece within a familiar and more comfortable context even as it broke away from that context. On the other hand, Curran's *Maritime Rites* (1984) had a more fluid and ambiguous characterization that embraced both its status as radio documentary and as electroacoustic music. Future research might profitably pursue the extent to which

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<sup>23</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 15. Referencing James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and David P. Miller, "Indeterminacy and Performance Practice in Cage's Variations," *American Music* 27/1 (Spring 2009): 60–86.

<sup>24</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 18. For Piekut, this is an example of "translation" within Actor Network Theory.

radio programs merged documentary radio with electroacoustic music, and whether (or not) this merger meant relinquishing the new music's ties to its "Other" of concert music.

Finally, this dissertation has offered analysis of the chorus of voices presented in *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites*. I have listened to *RadioVisions*'s music-historiographic voices in the form of narration, its presentation of voices as musical material, and those voices' relationships to the vocal norms of spoken voices on NPR. The dominant speakers of public broadcasting played a powerful role in framing the voices of *RadioVisions*, even while the voices presented in it reinforced and modified those norms. My close reading of *Maritime Rites*'s "Rattlesnake Mountain" advocated for a less divisive approach to the binary of language and embodiment, rejecting the notion that language reveals the mind while non-linguistic sound reveals the body. It is my hope that these unconventional approaches to *RadioVisions* and *Maritime Rites* lead to further attention to text-sound pieces heard in the context of their creative medium and to a less rigid demarcation between language and body in analysis.

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Box 211a (Unnumbered Folders)

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